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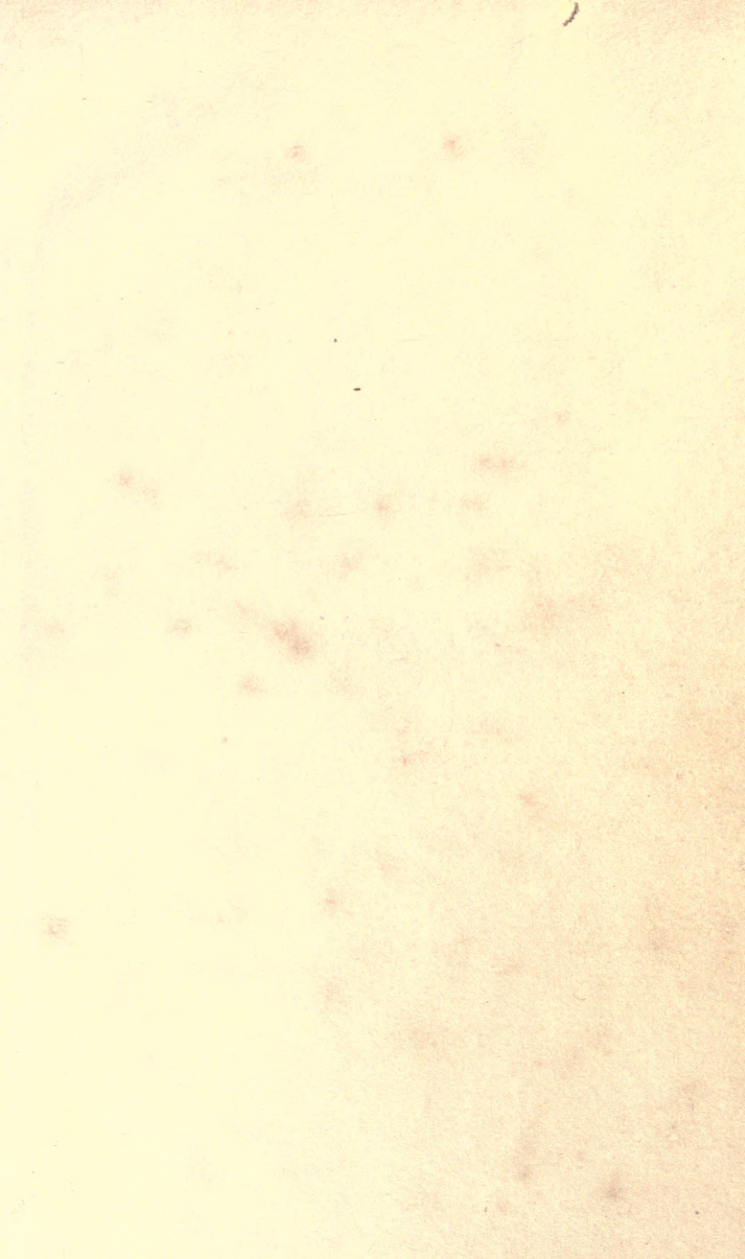
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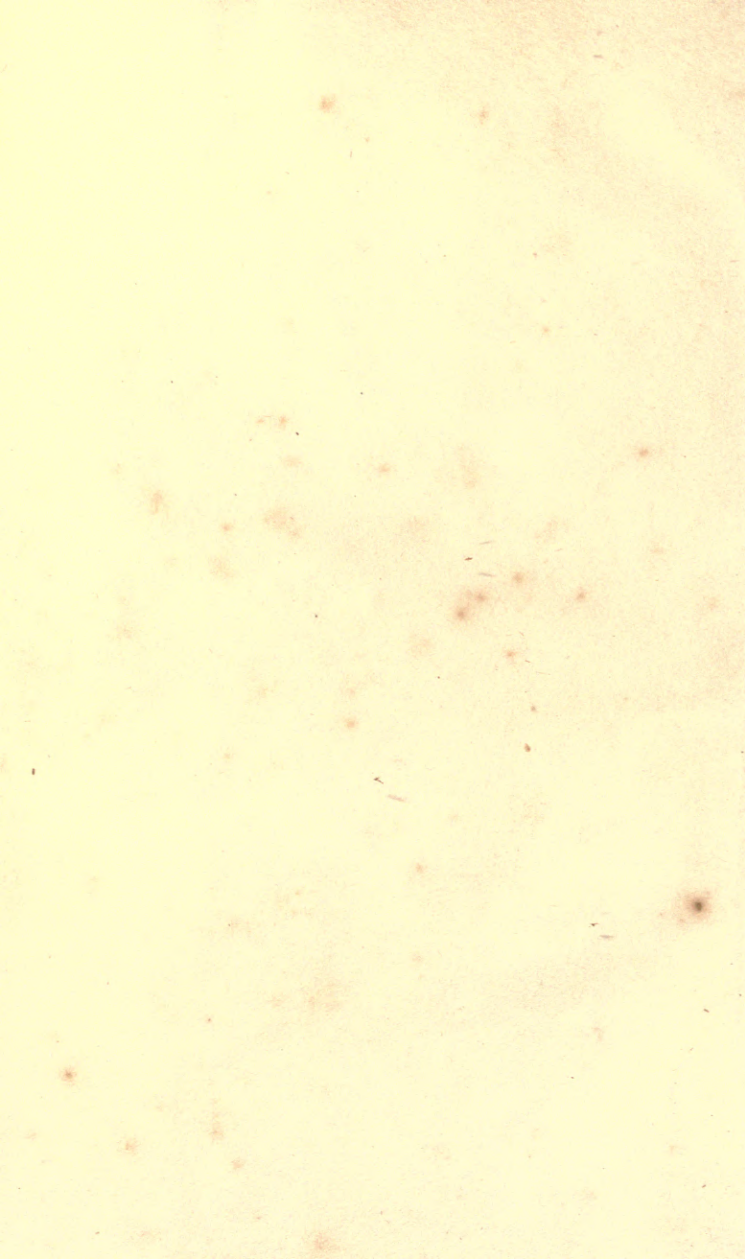
Her Father

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HINTS
ON
CONVERSATION.

HINTS

ON

CONVERSATION,

&c. &c.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,

BY A LADY.

“The world may teach the *mode*; the *spirit* must be
learned from the Gospel of Christ.”

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1819.

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PREFACE.

DOMESTIC circumstances, of an interesting nature, many years since suggested the idea of translating this little volume into *English*. But a variety of important avocations obliged the Translator, to delay the accomplishment of her design. The work is now offered to the Public, with a hope, that the interruptions, incident to a situation of much care and responsibility, may obtain indulgence for the many imperfections, that will be found in its execution.

The Translator feels very grateful, for the kind and liberal patronage, which her undertaking has experienced ; and trusts that, notwithstanding its inaccuracies, the work may be found useful, particularly by the younger classes of society. She has taken some liberties with the original, chiefly in the way of omission.

The Author's name is BORDELON ; the title of his book " La Langue ;" it was written about the year 1700 ; and has been translated into German, and Flemish ; but never before into English.

Contents.

	PAGE
ON Conversation	1
On Loquacity	28
On Silence	42
On Wit	50
On Punning	57
On Raillery	60
On Disputation	69
On Obstinacy	87
On Thoughtlessness	90
On Compliments	94
On Praise	98
On Flattery	116
On Falsehood	128
On Boasting	131
On Calumny	138
On Oaths	144
On Promises	147
On the Circulation of News	153
On Reports	158
On Advice	161

	PAGE
On Reproof	169
On Instruction	176
On Secrecy	195
On Female Conversation	202
On Love	214
On Complaint	222
On Consolation	227

CONSOLATORY REFLECTIONS.

— Under Adversity and Vicissitudes of Fortune	230
— On Melancholy	243
— Under Contemptuous Treatment or Calumny	245
— In a low Station	254
— In a Dependant Situation	274
— Addressed to Persons of obscure Birth	277
— In Pain and Sickness	281
— On the Loss of Fortune and Friends	282
— For Persons engaged in a laborious Line of Life	284
Persuasives against undue Apprehension of Future Events	288
Consolatory Reflections in Poverty	293
— On the Prospect of Death	313

CONVERSATION.

1.

CONVERSATION *completes the work of study and reflection, and forms the chief inducement to them.*

There is no greater object of compassion than a learned recluse, who, by some luckless chance, finds himself enclosed in a well-informed circle of fashion. His painful silence, his dry manner, and awkward expressions, all, by turns, spread around him a sympathetic embarrassment. We should either resign the intercourse of civilized society altogether, or subscribe our quota to its amusement. Let the abstractions of metaphysical truth engross

the solitary hours of a man whose taste they suit; but let him not expect that, in mixed society, they will excite any measure of attention equal to that, which he has himself devoted to their investigation. If the darling theme must absolutely be introduced, let him speak upon it with such clearness, as to require only that small portion of attention, which persons extremely jealous of their liberty, who dread a lengthened chain of reasoning, and start at the shadow of restraint, can spare on such an occasion. Those, whom we have wearied in conversation, will derive no benefit from the most valuable truths we may have uttered, on account of that feeling of ennui, which will be associated with the recollection of them.

The man, who would enter into society with advantage to himself, or others, must acquire those social habits, which can only be learned by entering frequently into it. Conversation may, in a certain sense, be

called the book of the world, and be said to teach the use of other books; without it, science is severe in aspect, and destitute of charm. Study will encrease the talents bestowed by nature; but conversation is necessary to give them currency. The most learned greatly improve their knowledge by an intercourse with others, since it constantly affords them opportunities of discovering and resolving difficulties, which in their closets would never have occurred to their minds. I have often, in conversation, been made sensible of my imperfect acquaintance with subjects, of which, in the solitude of my study, I had imagined myself master: and therefore never feel securely possessed of any argument, until I have subjected it to the test of colloquial discussion. So true it is, that the society of sensible men is a school, in which we learn with ease and pleasure, what they have learnt with pain and difficulty.

2.—*The true art of pleasing in conversation consists, in giving others an opportunity of appearing to advantage.*

We throw as it were a favourable light on our companions, by offering them an opportunity of discovering the pleasing talents they possess. Ideas should be but partly disclosed to a man of refinement, and their complete developement left to his own ingenuity; for we by this means intimate the high opinion we entertain of his abilities, and delicately flatter his self-complacency. Though respect may be extorted by the discovery of our own wit or knowledge, a secret ill-will but too frequently attends it, as our auditors feel mortified at seeing themselves surpassed: therefore, when we are with persons, who betray this apprehension of being eclipsed, it is sufficient to show that we are not entirely ignorant of the subject under discussion. If we then en-

deavour to gain information from those around us, and are politely attentive to their feelings, to listen will be a greater pleasure than to speak.

The tale, every circumstance of which has been already heard, will afford a benevolent mind higher satisfaction in the repetition, than could have been derived from interrupting the relater, to display a prior acquaintance with his story. The attention paid to his recital, spares him the mortification of perceiving that he has been tedious, and leaves him the pleasure of imagining that he has contributed to our amusement. Nor are we ungratified, or unrewarded for our patience, since we are certain of being regarded with a more favourable eye, than if we had shown ourselves to be already well informed of the circumstances of his little history.

The wish to outshine others cannot be too carefully repressed: we should rather

aim to promote the gentle courtesies of life, by assisting our friends to appear such as they desire. This obliging conduct would spread a glow of good humour all around, and would illustrate the remark, that we are never more pleased with a conversation, than when we retire conscious of having left with others a pleasing impression of ourselves.

3.—*We should acquire so perfect a command of ourselves, as to be able to suffer interruption without shewing impatience.*

Our view in talking should be either to afford amusement, or instruction: this would preclude all emotions of anger, when our hearers interrupt us, since they can do so, but to promote their own greater enjoyment or information. The interruption may indeed be unseasonable, and will often be mortifying, but seldom will it be really

injurious; for those who witness the impropriety will do us justice, and esteem us more highly for our patience, than they would have done for the most brilliant thing we could have said. The desire of talking must never be allowed to obtain an ascendancy; it should be severely reined, and checked, or moderately indulged, according to passing circumstances.

It must be admitted, that such a degree of self-command is not easily to be attained; but persevering endeavours will eventually secure it, unless frustrated by the unrepressed workings of vanity.

4.—*A short interval of silence should be allowed, when a person ceases to speak, in order to observe whether he has any thing further to add.*

How much is it to be regretted, that an excessive desire to talk, ourselves, should

so frequently induce us to snatch the words from the person who is speaking, and by this means prevent his imparting sentiments, which might be both useful and pleasing, and which he would have communicated, had time been allowed him to continue his discourse! In this impatience, originates the great imperfection of social converse; the eagerness of each individual to begin his part, before that of his fellow comedian is completed.

Montaigne says: "In the school of human commerce I have often remarked, that instead of acquiring a knowledge of others, we seek only to impart a knowledge of ourselves; and are more anxious to dispose of our own merchandise, than to purchase the commodities of our neighbour."

This displeasing error would be avoided, by giving the person, who has spoken, time to pause, and subduing all impatience to press into the chair which he appears dis-

posed to relinquish. Let us remember that those who are in haste to reply, can seldom give a just or suitable answer; for not having allowed themselves time to comprehend every idea, they cannot know all that is necessary to be known. In their eagerness to enter the lists, they suffer the last words of him, who preceded them, to pass unregarded; and intent solely on catching an opportunity to speak, they consequently neglect to listen.

Perhaps one of the chief reasons that so few people are agreeable, or even rational, in conversation, is, that almost all think more of the speech they wish to make, than of the answer they ought to give.

5.—*A just answer cannot be given to a question, which is imperfectly comprehended.*

The inconsistency and obscurity, so frequently obvious in conversation, chiefly

proceed from the small degree of attention we usually pay to what is said by our companions; which, nevertheless, does not prevent our replying as confidently, as if we had listened to every word they had spoken. Hence arises a perpetual game at cross-purposes, ending in the most ludicrous mistakes.

I have so often remarked the absurdities occasioned by this unmannerly inattention, the unseasonable questions asked, and the inapplicable answers returned, that I keep a constant guard on myself, lest I should be guilty of similar improprieties; and listen attentively to what is said, as much to avoid giving pain, as with a view of gaining instruction.

Another, and not unfrequent, fault is, that of intrusively answering a question, in the place of the person to whom it was addressed; and by that means giving him, and your whole circle, reason to conclude you

suspect him of incapacity, whilst you, at the same time, draw on yourself the well-merited charge of presumption.

We should do wisely to prune our replies of all their dead branches;—those useless words, to which Plutarch alludes, when he advises, “that the centre of the circumference of an answer, should be, solely, what the inquirer wishes to learn.” It is true that conversation ought not to be studied, but neither should it be set free from the restrictions of taste and discretion.

6.—*Mutual confidence conduces more to conversation than wit itself.*

Mutual confidence promotes freedom, and banishes restraint: our hearts are reciprocally opened, their sentiments flow freely, and meeting no obstacle, expand in the delightful liberty of unreserved communication. But when the wish of shining is

suffered to intrude, attention being drawn to one point, the channels of our ideas become dry, and conversation is soon exhausted. We may, therefore, constantly observe, that the most unstudied conversation is the most amusing, and the most easily supported; while that which is premeditated, neither gives pleasure to those who listen, nor does honor to him who speaks. A book would be a far more eligible companion; for, when weary, we might quit it without giving offence.

7.—*We ought not to watch for the little inadvertencies, which occur in conversation.*

Though our whole attention be engaged in conversation, yet we should not examine rigorously every sentiment that is carelessly dropped. It is a free intercourse, in which many smaller errors should be kindly overlooked, and not summoned to stand a legal

trial. They were suffered to escape, because the speaker confided in the indulgence of his companions; and they should not encounter the severities of criticism.

8.—*Conversation may be compared to a game of Chess, in which the disposition of the whole board should be considered, before any piece be moved.*

Every one must feel the impropriety of giving way to a vein of pleasantry, when surrounded by those who mourn; or of entering on moral disquisitions, in the midst of a sprightly group, who breathe nothing but mirth. A gloomy aspect alone has often cast a damp on the spirits of a joyous party; and a precise demeanour, though it may sometimes impose on the thoughtless, will rather revolt, than attract them. For the same reason, a declamation against the muses would be ill-received by one who

piqued himself on his poetic powers; and a man, who was unacquainted with the sciences, would hardly be charmed by that display of knowledge, which led to the detection of his ignorance.

The pleasure of our auditors, rather than our own gratification, should be kept in view; and the more carefully, since we shall ourselves inevitably share the fate of our conversation, and please, or displease, as that is found agreeable, or the reverse.

9.—*He who makes himself frequently the subject of his own conversation, will be treated with little mercy in the discussions of his neighbours.*

By making ourselves the perpetual theme of our own conversation, we afford grounds for the conclusion, that we love and esteem ourselves supremely; and this is quite sufficient, to prevent our obtaining the smallest

portion of those sentiments from any one besides. Indeed, is it not most unreasonable that he, who thinks of no person but himself, should yet expect to be the sole object of the thoughts of all his acquaintance? If we are not able to contribute much to the pleasure of conversation, we may at least avoid rendering it disagreeable, or tiresome, which will most certainly be the effect of egotism long continued.

Every rule of prudence, also, forbids our talking of ourselves, for, if we speak with praise, we shall incur a degree of ridicule, which our utmost skill and circumlocution will not avert; and if with dispraise, we shall be accused of a stratagem to engage others to take up our defence. Besides, why should *we* speak ill of ourselves? Has not our observation of mankind taught us, that there is a sufficient number of people always ready to relieve us from that office? and if we may neither praise, nor blame, what remains for us to say?

10.—*Much circumspection and address are necessary, in speaking of persons in their presence.*

The character and conduct of those, who are present, may be spoken of, by veiling them under the names of those who are absent. By this management, they may be praised without apparent flattery, reproved without offensive rudeness, and counselled without an assumption of superiority.

11.—*We should speak but little, if we were not rendered talkative by self-conceit.*

It is seldom an injustice to suspect great talkers of much self-conceit, since their chief incentive to loquacity is, the persuasion that what they say is highly worthy of attention. A humble estimation of our own talents, would prevent our deeming them indispensably necessary to the charm of conversation, and would lead us willingly to

permit such as were weary of us, to transfer their attention where they could find greater entertainment. Genuine humility might even enable us to extend forgiveness to those, who had fallen asleep in the midst of our story; it might whisper, that they had only done, what we should long to do in a similar situation, and this little mortification might in the end prove, likewise, a useful stimulus to our powers of entertainment.

So large a fund of sense is necessary, to defray the expenses of constant exhibition, that frequent, and considerable, intervals of silence are advisable for most people: besides, our faculties are fatigued by long continued exertion, and the being stretched to their utmost extent, the mind is soothed and cheered by that conversation only, which demands less cleverness than we possess.

12.—*It is not enough that a man makes himself heard, he must also take care to make himself understood.*

Clearness of expression denotes clearness of conception, and both concur to render conversation pleasing, by making it intelligible. It is far better to remain altogether silent, than to stammer out a mass of ill-digested thoughts, the drift of which cannot be discovered by our hearers, without a painful exercise of attention. This tax, to say the truth, they generally evade, by listening with their eyes only, while their minds are engaged by every trifle which is passing around them.

A due regard to rendering our conversation intelligible, seems to exclude those technical terms which are not in common use, and which are surely misplaced in general conversation. Without particular examples in this place, the memory of the

reader will furnish him with sufficient illustrations of the meaning of this hint.

The mutual intelligence, so necessary in society, is disregarded by those also, who are perpetually skipping from subject to subject, and thus, so effectually break the connexion of their ideas, as to produce only a senseless chaos of unfinished thoughts.

13.—*Avoid those singularities which would draw on you the charge of eccentricity, and cause you to be denominated "An Original."*

It may not be wholly useless to sketch a few of the singularities, which have exposed to ridicule the persons who were guilty of them, in order to place the heedless on their guard against contracting habits of the same nature.

The first species, with which my memory presents me, is that of introducing at every

moment some fashionable, and therefore favorite phrase, which is made the turning point of every speech. Though at first new and brilliant, it soon becomes so worn and dimmed by perpetual repetition, that we should with pleasure exchange it for expressions, the most obsolete and barbarous.

A second sort of *originality*, is that of the man, who, apparently mistaking the situation of the ears, thrusts his face close to the person he accosts; besprinkles him with,—not the purest of dew; presses forward as the besieged draws back, till at last, having blockaded him in some corner, whence there is no escape, he forces the hapless victim to sustain his merciless broadside.

The man, who is the first, and often the only person, to laugh at his own story, betrays an *originality*, which at least affords as much diversion as it enjoys: but, alas! this self-applause so extremely resembles folly, that he, who indulges in it, will not escape

the sneer, reserved for self-complacent imbecility.

There are also laughers *impromptus*, who laugh merely to display white teeth: on this class, the most lamentable story, or most melancholy object, has the effect of extending the month, instead of suffusing the eyes; uninfluenced by time, place, or circumstance, their monotonous laugh perpetually obtrudes itself.

A fifth set of persons whom I shall point out as beacons, are those, who condescend not to pay the slightest attention to the conversation passing around them, but, wrapped in deep reverie, muse,—or would seem to muse,—on something quite foreign to it. This absence of mind evinces a low opinion of the company present, who, on their side, would gladly dispense with the inanimate forms of these meditative statues.

14.—*The tongue which pronounces an immodest word, is the interpreter of a corrupted heart.*

Licentious conversation, or indelicate inuendos excite, in every virtuous mind, the most lively indignation against the person who has dared to give them utterance: and it may ever be justly doubted, whether there can be purity of conduct, among those who blush not to allow themselves this sort of license.

A pure mind can endure no impurity; the slightest taint alarms and offends it; words are images of the thoughts; and, in this case, expressions are actions.

It will be very difficult for those, who mix in conversations where every thing is ventured,—where no respect is shown to modesty,—it will indeed be very difficult for them to continue guiltless; for, as the most ungovernable desires are awakened in their

minds, they will scarcely deny to their senses, the pleasures with which they have indulged their imaginations.



15.—*Never address to any person a question, which you think he may be incapable of answering.*

We should make it an inviolable rule, never to make inquiries of a person, on any subject, on which we have reason to believe him uninformed: with this simple precaution, we may freely seek instruction, for we shall generally afford pleasure to those from whom we obtain it.

Reputation is dear to every man; and we have no right, by embarrassing questions, to endanger a possession, the loss of which is so acutely felt, and of which the recovery is so difficult.

16.—*The shame, which prevents us from asking for instruction, is a feeling to which we should, in ourselves, give no quarter.*

By requesting instruction, we prove that we are free from the self-conceit, which leads so many persons to imagine themselves wiser than they are; and surely in this there is nothing disgraceful; nor need we blush to avow a desire to have our ignorance removed. True knowledge, let it be remembered, can never be acquired by those who pretend to more information than they really possess.

17.—*Exaggeration is highly injurious to the reputation of him who employs it; betraying both a bad taste, and a confined understanding.*

If a child had seen during infancy only one man of usual height, he would not fail,

from comparing him with his own diminutive stature, to consider him a giant. A similar error is common to men of limited minds: the most ordinary objects appearing to them wonderful, they describe them in a strain of hyperbole. If, in some instances, narrowness of understanding is not the cause of this excessive amplification, it must, I fear, be imputed to a failure in prudence and veracity. Men of sense and principle rarely speak in superlatives; both because this stile of expression does violence to truth, and because it injures the reputation of the speaker. They have observed, also, that heightened colouring always produces an effect, contrary to the expectation of him who employs it: and that the fear of not saying enough to persuade, induces people to say too much to be believed. Men of discernment regard these exaggerations as they do "all monstrous, all prodigious things," with a certain degree of scepticism: they are

generally great economists of their belief, and bestow it only on evident and incontestible truths; now, among such, these marvels seldom deserve to be classed.

But not only does exaggeration lower the character in human estimation, it must be contemplated in a yet more serious light; as totally inconsistent with that simplicity, which characterizes the real christian; and as incurring those awful penalties, denounced against habitual violation of the truth.

18.—*The best safeguard for the ignorant is, silence.*

When we are uninformed on any subject, which is discussed before us, the best line we can adopt is, to be silent. Vanity will whisper a different counsel, but her suggestions must be disregarded. Silence will, in such circumstances, bring its own reward,

and we shall be more likely to receive praise for our discretion, than to be suspected of that ignorance, which we must have betrayed had we mixed in the conversation.

ON LOQUACITY.

I.

IT is very difficult, not to say impossible, to talk much, and at the same time to talk well.

Every chatterer must be deficient in taste and judgment, which are indispensable requisites towards forming an elegant and pleasing conversation. Without these, neither the proper time and manner, nor the true end of speaking, will be observed. This reflection seems to escape the inordinate talker, borne away as he is by his impetuosity, and engrossed by the desire of giving vent to a flood of eloquence, which

he cannot restrain without doing insupportable violence to his feelings. Provided he can but talk, he cares not what may be the subject: talking is his dearest joy;—his all;—it is “the cherished madness of his heart;”—or rather, its cherished folly. A man under the influence of this mania, will give you, even at a first interview, and without your expressing a wish for the recital, the history of his life at full length: he will dilate on the past, the present, and the future; on what he was, what he is, and what he intends to be. No time is allowed for the introduction of a single word on your part. Not only he tells you more than you wish to hear, but more also than he wishes to disclose; for, in his very first harangue, he convinces you that he is devoid of prudence, taste, and understanding.

2.—*He who talks too much, frequently betrays his own secrets.*

Great talkers are commonly found to be incapable of silence, even on affairs which require the utmost secrecy. Whatever may have been their previous resolutions, it is impossible, but that in the profusion of their words, something will escape, which it is their interest to suppress: and this will be the case, more especially, when they talk to people who have a private end to answer, by encouraging their indiscretion.

Since they are thus liable to betray their own secrets, I would caution all, whom inexperience may render unreserved, against intrusting to them any affair, the disclosure of which would be injurious to either party. Nor will they, by a scrupulous attention to this admonition, lay themselves open to the charge of adopting an ungenerous policy; since no great acknowledgment is due to

these loquacious personages, for the confidence they repose in us; a confidence springing, rather from their impatient desire to unburden themselves, than from any esteem that we have inspired.

“ I tell you this as a profound secret; breathe not a syllable of it, I conjure you;” says one of this magpie race, after having chattered to you incessantly for a whole morning: he then departs, and pours the same history into every ear, that will endure it. He leaves you, indeed, scarcely a possibility of betraying the secret; for to whom could you relate it, who would not be found to have learnt it, previously, from himself?

3.—*Chatterers are, in general, both despicable and despised.*

The contempt manifested for very loquacious persons, is excited by the opinion, that they are equally shallow in penetration,

giddy and indiscreet in conduct, and weak in understanding. To these humiliating suspicions they subject themselves, by their evident inability to restrain their love of talking; by their inattention to the proprieties of conversation; their total want of reserve; and the superficial knowledge they obtain of the sentiments of their auditors respecting themselves; a deeper insight into which, would have shown them, when it was right to speak, and when to be silent.

But, if they deserve the world's contempt, they meet with even more than their desert: few deign to listen to their orations, and they, who cannot avoid paying an apparent attention, shrink into themselves, and, wrapped closely in their own meditations, turn a deafened ear to the violence of the storm without. Nor is this the worst: from their lips, truth itself loses its authority; and men suspect (their love of talking being so great) that when they have not facts

to dwell upon, they will rather fabricate a falsehood, than submit to silence.

4.—*A chatterer talks for ever, though no one listen; and, on the other hand, never listens whosoever may speak.*

Chatterers may be said to have exchanged the entire faculty of hearing, for an increase of the faculty of speech; so that their case is almost desperate: its only remedy would be the gentle and rational admonitions of a friend; but, far from being disposed to listen to such, they allow no pause in their own tedious, and unprofitable jargon.

Whilst the chatterer is exhausting the patience of his hearers, whilst some are giving vent to their indignation, and others are busied in disproving his assertions, and disputing his maxims, do you wisely retire within yourself, and strengthen your resolutions against being led into habits so dis-

pleasing; and you will reap more profit from your own reflections, than others will gain by their remonstrances.

5.—*Chatterers are feared, as much as they are despised.*

These pests of society are universally shunned, and their entrance into a party is a sort of signal for its dispersion. All who can absent themselves, without manifest incivility, quickly retire, like mariners, who hasten into harbour when the low murmurings of a threatening wind announce the rising tempest. The few who remain are silent, from the dread of leading to some endless and wearisome harangue. Yet a chatterer never perceives the aversion he inspires, for he is too much occupied by his rage for talking, to observe its effect on the feelings of others; regardless even of the dictates of humanity, he hastens to

impart distressing news to those, who would have remained in peace, had they remained in ignorance.

The hospitality of his table cannot make amends for the ceaseless noise which prevails at it, nor for the constant fear in which his guests are kept, by his ungoverned vehemence of action : a means resorted to, in order to enforce attention, which nothing but the dread of personal injury could long ensure.

But, oh ! say you who have experienced them, what are the sufferings of an invalid, needing repose and silence, when unhappily infested by a person of this character ? Will all his virtues, all his well-meant endeavors to amuse, make amends for the torment he unwittingly inflicts ? and would not the preference universally be given to a man, of far inferiour worth, but, whom an intercourse with polished society had taught consideration for the feelings of his companions ?

6.—*Great talkers forfeit by their words, the praises justly due to their virtuous actions.*

No one gives these loquacious personages due credit for the meritorious deeds they have performed; since they are suspected of having acted well, principally with a view to talk of their achievements; besides, as the appendage is so sadly tiresome, we are not much disposed to admire the actions, to which we are indebted for it. Thus does a chatterer defame his very virtues! It is, indeed, most lamentable to see a man so blindly his own enemy, and the tormentor of all around him.

7.—*There are few chatterers, who are not excessively curious.*

In order to supply their constant expenditure, these gentlemen are obliged to forage

among their neighbours; and in quest of booty, they make incursions into every family in their vicinity, prying into what is most carefully concealed, and afterwards producing it for the public entertainment.

A chatterer begins by talking of others, proceeds to talk of himself, and when his remarks on real facts are exhausted, will have recourse to invention rather than be silent.

The commercial relations of the chattering company are very extensive: curiosity supplies the staple of their traffic; what it imports is well worked up, and retailed with all possible amplification.

8.—*A chatterer is so intent on talking; that he forgets to act.*

Though the most urgent business require his immediate and entire attention, he cannot resolve to leave the society, in

which he is indulging his favourite propensity, and resign the dear delights of talking. Various messengers come in succession to summon him away; but no one can arrest his course; and he never quits the party, until, wearied by his garrulity, the last of his auditors appears ready to quit him: as long as any individual seems to listen, he imagines a desire is manifested that he should talk, and therefore continues with unwearied pertinacity.

Now follow him to his home: even there he sets not seriously to work, whilst he can find any one to whom he may enumerate the various things he has to do. His tongue, "that little member," is his helm, his mainspring, his primum-mobile. He thinks, he acts, he moves, but with a view to talk; and were it not for this hope, he would neither move, nor act; nay, if possible, he would not even think.

9.—*Those who talk much, reflect but little.*

How many of the faults of conversation might be corrected, did we but accustom ourselves to reflect! For reflection would acquaint us with what is wrong in ourselves, would discover its origin, point out its consequences, and suggest the means of avoiding them.

If a chatterer did but reflect, he would discover the sources of his loquacity to be inordinate self-love, or unwarrantable conceit. Did he but reflect, he would perceive the injurious consequences of his fault: its wearisome effect on others; the waste it occasions of that time; which ought to be so precious in the estimation of an accountable being; the contempt and ridicule to which it subjects him, and which he would infer from the remarks made on other talkative persons. He would become sensible that he was guilty of indiscretion in his own con-

cerns, and of infidelity in the affairs confided to him. Reflection would also teach him the means of escaping all these evils: placed on his guard by this friendly monitor, he would neither talk unnecessarily, nor reply in haste to the questions which were addressed to him: still less would he anticipate the answer requested of another. He would be led to practise an important branch of self-denial, by avoiding those subjects most flattering to his vanity, from their affording a field for the display of his information. By habitually shunning praise, he would, at last, become nearly indifferent to it; and, when conferred, as it would excite less of that communicative feeling,—joy, it would not be so liable to lead to the indulgence of his predominant infirmity. He would also avoid with care the stile of society, which fostered his unfortunate propensity, and would associate, as much as possible, with those persons whose supe-

riority imposed reserve and silence. Before he spoke, he would ask himself these questions: Will what I am about to say be injurious to myself? and will it be either useful, or agreeable to others? Lastly, reflection would teach him how to act in his intercourse with his fellow-creatures, and would preserve him from numberless violations of the divine commands.

ON SILENCE.

1.

***F**EW directions are necessary to him, whose words are few.*

As rules and directions are given, chiefly, with a view to regulate our conduct in the intercourse of social life; and as the love of talking is a principal cause of the disorders which prevail in it; it is evident, that the less we talk, the less we shall need admonitory precepts.

To impose silence on ourselves, at proper seasons, is a most judicious part of self-government: and, as the attention, which it permits us to pay to our duties, aids us

considerably in the discharge of them; so, the dissipation of thought, occasioned by excessive talking, contributes not a little to our numerous omissions. There are certain obligations, so conformable to nature and reason, that they are unavoidably recognized by those, who prefer reflection, to dissertation.

2.—*We should hold communion with ourselves, before we converse with others.*

The person, who begins a conversation without having previously ascertained what he has to say, is most probably laying up food for repentance. How often, after an evening passed in thoughtless repartee, have we been followed to our closets by feelings of self-reproach, which we might have avoided, had we but prepared our *minds* for company, with as much care as we adorned our *persons*.

Reflecting, in solitude, on the conversation in which we have been engaged, we discover, that we possess much more sense and judgment than we evinced in it: because, after having talked to others without consideration, we then examine the subject, with minds sufficiently disengaged to seize those ideas, which had before escaped us.

Nevertheless, an unfavourable impression of our character has been received, which it will be difficult to efface: for swiftly as an injudicious word passes, it leaves a lasting trace behind. It will dwell in the memory of men, too often jealous of merit, and gratified by finding defects in those, who vie with themselves in talent.

It is infinitely more advantageous, to converse much with ourselves, than to take a conspicuous part in conversation with others: the latter can, at most, but raise an expectation of cleverness, which per-

haps we do not really possess; whereas, by self-communion, we acquire the knowledge which great talkers wish to display, but which is very seldom at their command.

3.—*A word, unseasonably spoken, may have irreparable consequences.*

Silence is highly useful, by giving time for the selection of those subjects, which are suited to the present occasion. Often might youthful precipitancy receive a salutary check from reflections like the following: Had I just now said, what I was on the point of saying, I should have involved myself in difficulties, the very idea of which makes me shudder; yet, without consideration, it would have escaped me; for the most fatal word is easily pronounced, and this one word might have been my ruin! Of what importance then is it, to follow the good old rule, and, reflect before we speak!

4.—*By speaking little, we may acquire, and secure much reputation.*

A man of sense, who talks but little, raises our opinion of his wisdom to a higher point than, perhaps, he really deserves: for, having much intellectual wealth, yet drawing on it unfrequently, and the little he produces bearing so fine a stamp, we are naturally led to believe that he has abundant and valuable treasures in store.

Silence inspires a respect, proportioned to the esteem we entertain for the person by whom it is observed. The silence of a great politician, for instance, throws around him an air of mystery, which heightens the admiration felt for him by his inferiours; of his superiours it gains him the approbation, as a man of consummate prudence: it procures him the esteem of his Sovereign, as one in whom confidence may be securely placed; enhances his value to his friends,

by proving his discretion: and, lastly, in his enemies, it excites an undefinable dread of a man, who veils himself in clouds whilst he forms the thunderbolt: his silence portends an overwhelming storm, the more awful from the preceding stillness.

A person who speaks little, but speaks to the purpose, may pass well through the world with a very ordinary degree of merit.

Well-timed silence adds an inexpressible grace to a man's conversation: it is as the shade to colouring; as the pause after the full-toned chorus.

5.—*Speech should resemble gold, and, in a small extent, comprise great worth.*

Useless words shew a trifling mind, but a solid understanding leads its possessor directly to the material point: rejecting all that is superfluous, it dwells only on what is essential; and wastes not its powers on

the *nothings*, which a trifler swells into importance.

In a man of an intelligent mind, ideas abound more than words; his countenance often supersedes the necessity of language; and his mouth may possibly be his least communicative feature. His domestics read his wishes in his looks, and serve him the better, from not being bewildered by a variety of orders. The short directions, which he gives, are regarded as oracles; they are heard with attention, and obeyed with alacrity.

6.—*The most simple of men, if he is capable of silent attention, may fathom the most subtle.*

The artful do not, in general, mistrust those, in whom they remark simplicity of character; and are often little on their guard before them. These simple ones, by quietly

observing what passes, are able to see through the designs of the veteran dissembler; and to guard against the machinations of talkative cunning.

7.—*Silence is estimable, only, when it proceeds from a proper motive.*

Silence may proceed from stupidity, from indolence, from incivility, or from pride; and, when it arises from either of these sources, it deserves not to be praised or imitated. To take up a book, whilst our friends are speaking to us; to stand looking out of a window, and affect not to hear what is said around us; with similar marks of inattention, will draw down the just contempt of all present, in return for the indifference manifested towards them: the lightest charges we could incur, by such conduct, are those of rudeness and imbecility.

ON WIT.

1.

A Witticism may destroy the reputation of the most deserving work, or that of a man of the highest worth.

A witticism, directed against any person, or any literary production, will please, in the first instance, from the ingenuity of its nature; and in the second, from the sarcasm it contains; for men are often more gratified by hearing their contemporaries condemned, than by hearing them commended. The stroke of wit, which pleases, is not forgotten; it is repeated, and passes on from mouth to mouth, and from age to

age : in this manner, collections have been transmitted to us of the brilliant sayings of the Ancients, the attic salt of which has preserved them from corruption. Hence it frequently happens, that those, who have not even seen the objects of the satire, and who never will see them, form, notwithstanding, as contemptuous an opinion of them, as if they had witnessed the absurdities imputed to them. The person, who made the witty remark, was probably actuated by a desire to say a clever thing, rather than by any wish to do an injury. The bon-mot, however, circulates, and the aggrieved subject of it is regarded with a prejudice, which extends in proportion to the force of the satire. A literary work can hardly ever recover from a fall, occasioned by an ingenious epigram : and an appropriate nick-name (to use the popular, though inclegant term) adheres so closely to a man, that he is unable to shake it off during a

whole life: nay, it often descends to his posterity.

2.—*Wit seasons conversation, and renders it enlivening.*

Wit is, however, a seasoning that must not be dealt out with an unsparing hand, as seems to be too much the practice of those, who, desiring to be distinguished for their brilliancy, assume the character of epigrammatists; and rack their brains incessantly for smart sayings: so that their conversation resembles the printed repositories of wit, in which jest after jest succeed each other with wearisome monotony.

A piece of wit, like a piece of old plate, loses much of its value at second hand: the workmanship is out of date, the occasion which gave it merit, at first, is wanting at the repetition; and its effect must therefore be considerably weakened. Detached from

the circumstances in which it originated, a witticism may be compared to a diamond, fallen from its setting, which has lost much of its previous beauty; or, (if you will admit another simile) to a tennis ball, caught at the second rebound, deprived of nearly all its elastic force.

3.—*A very good jest has often had very bad consequences.*

It is certainly pleasing, to communicate a brilliant thought, as it presents itself to the fancy; yet much precaution is necessary, before we yield to the inclination. Its consequences should be anticipated; and no utterance be allowed it, unless we have reason to believe that it will occasion pleasure, without inflicting pain. This conduct would preserve us from the sad dilemmas, into which thoughtless persons so often bring themselves; and we should not forfeit a

substantial good, in order to sparkle for a moment.

What folly is it, to incur serious inconvenience, for so slight a satisfaction! Those who listen, laugh, it is true; but do they esteem the author of their amusement the more highly for his witty effusion? The perfume of the wild thyme may be refreshing to the traveller, yet he will thanklessly pass on, and crush it beneath his feet.

4.—*If we feel complacency at having made a witty remark, we experience proportionate vexation, when we find others do not enjoy it.*

Nothing so deeply mortifies the man who piques himself on saying a good thing, as to observe serious faces, where he had predetermined to excite a laugh: and this happens not unfrequently; for an Englishman will not even smile “by compulsion,” but

obstinately perseveres in his gravity when he perceives a plan is laid to force him to be merry.

Professed wits need so great a variety of talents, in order to maintain their character, that few succeed in the attempt; and of these few, the best are rather tolerated, than admired. Those, who begin by promising to raise a laugh, are seldom able to fulfil their engagement: and those, who are the first to laugh at their own story, do not often find their mirth infectious.

We may impart, at pleasure, to our companions any ingenious and harmless thought that occurs to our fancy, provided we do so without affectation: but no inflection of the voice must betray, that we, ourselves, think it worthy of admiration; lest this self-approbation supersede the praise of our associates. It is their office, not ours, to discover the point of our wit, and to bestow on it the meed of commendation.

5.—*We often endanger the success of a brilliant remark, by claiming it as our own.*

There are, in the world, many minds so envious, that *present* merit cannot please them. It must be represented as foreign, or belonging to past ages, before they will allow its excellence; that is to say, it must be ascribed to persons, whose absence precludes all rivalry, and whose praises, therefore, do not rouse “the jaundiced fiend malign.”

ON PUNNING.

I.

PUNS, and other jests of that nature, should not be pronounced as if we thought them clever: they pass off well, only, when we attach no importance to them.

If we wish to amuse by a pun, we should rate it merely at its just value; that is, as a deceptive thought, or whimsical expression, the tinsel of which, flashing on the mind, may possibly brighten the countenance with a momentary smile.

Before fancy be allowed these wild frolics, care should be taken, that no great inequality of condition subsist, between the

person who makes the pun, and him to whom it is addressed. There are some, whom it ill-becomes to listen to this species of trifling; and others, in whom it is still less proper to be the authors of it: the master of a family, for instance, who exercises his wit on his domestics, will soon sink himself below their level. This license appears with peculiar impropriety, in those whose elevated station, or sacred office, demands a certain seriousness of deportment: it is a spot, which can sully the most eminent virtues, and which heroism itself cannot efface. In such characters, every thing should be on a noble scale, and these traits of littleness are, in them, particularly offensive.

2.—*The person who constantly excites laughter, does not usually engage respect.*

It has been remarked, that professed jesters are, like comic actors, rich in ap-

plause, but poor in esteem: we despise, whilst we laugh; particularly if they excite mirth by buffoonery; for there is not a more certain indication of bad taste, than this sort of pleasantry.

A jest may be allowable, when it is necessary to raise a sinking conversation, or to enliven one that is becoming stupid; and where there is no risk, that the person who indulges in it, will be regarded as the licensed fiddler of the company: but he should preserve the power of resuming composure, whenever he may think it proper; for reason should not, at any time, resign the helm to humour, or to levity.

ON RAILLERY.

1.

BEWARE of raillery:—*it is a snare laid by wit, to destroy repose.*

However amusing the thoughts, however well-turned the expressions, which, occurring to your mind, prompt it to give way to raillery, scrutinize them severely before you grant them utterance; and be secure, that the object of your pleasantry will be the first to laugh at, and enjoy it. This will not often happen, and rarely, therefore, should the inclination be indulged.

If a man abstain from raillery, because he has not the powers adapted to it, I com-

mend his prudence;—if he possess the power, and yet abstain, I praise his wisdom. No one can injure himself by avoiding this dangerous species of wit; but he will run a risk of doing so, if he exercise it on his friends; for though raillery may give spirit to conversation, it tends to alienate the minds of men from one another. The more satire there is among them, the less friendship will be found: and without friendship, how are the difficulties of life to be overcome? and, of what value is its prosperity? All the merit, all the intrigues of Scipio, could not procure him the edileship, because, having perceived that one of his competitors had galls on his hands, occasioned by cultivating his estate, Scipio had sarcastically asked him, whether he usually walked on all fours!

2.—*None bear so ill to be rallied themselves, as those, who are constantly rallying others.*

This fastidiousness arises, perhaps, from their being so conversant with the subject, that they are fully aware of its pernicious effects. Very few wits understand how to take a jest: they shine whilst they can display their own satire, but are truly pitiable when the raillery is turned against them. Habitual jesters make a poor figure, also, in conversations of an important and sacred nature, where raillery can have no admission: they stretch their listless limbs, yawn, and speak with an apathy, which wearies the patience, whilst it excites the compassion, of minds more highly endowed.

3.—*There are some persons, to whom the least approach towards raillery is an offence.*

So excessive is the susceptibility, so irritable the temperament, of certain minds, that the slightest touch inflicts on them a wound: and, with such characters, particular caution should be observed. To them, raillery is ever displeasing: their corrosive humour finds, or rather produces, a roughness in the very polish of the compliments they receive. Their own gall gives to every aliment a bitter taste. Highly necessary is it, thoroughly to understand the temper of those, with whom we venture on pleasantries; or, what was intended as a sportive sally, may become the occasion of a serious quarrel. A rough, morose, or fretful disposition should never be made the object of raillery.

With regard to ourselves, be this our rule: if we are rallied about trifles, let us

laugh with those who laugh: should the raillery, however, be injurious, and intentionally so; we must show that we perceive, and that we feel it, by which means we shall generally arrest its course; but, if the offensive sport be still continued, let us act as we should in the case of censure;—convert the unpleasant discipline to our advantage, by self-correction, if it is deserved; and by christian forbearance, if unmerited.

4.—*Consider, not only with whom, but also, before whom you jest.*

We should be well acquainted, not only with the persons whom we banter, but also, with those who witness our diversion. Were a sprightly girl to be rallied on her vivacity, in the presence of H * * * *, he would infallibly believe her to have incurred the charge of levity: and should a playful allusion be made to the prudent economy

of one person, or to a trifling degree of vanity in another, he would conclude the first to be a miser, and the second a mere fop.

5.—*We never use raillery with a friend, whom we tenderly love.*

Raillery finds no place in our intercourse with the objects of our warmest affections; and for this reason: that we in no case like it to be employed against ourselves. If the attack we make is founded in truth, we hurt the feelings of our friend; if in error, we do ourselves as great an injury as we inflict on him. True friendship possesses a talisman, which turns aside the shafts of irony.

There is a vein of satire, running through conversation of this nature, which inspires a secret fear of the person who is addicted to it, and makes it impossible for us to feel at ease in his society; consequently, he is

avoided, misrepresented, and at last, regarded as an enemy.

6.—*It is as dishonourable, for a superiour to attack an inferiour with raillery, as, for an armed man to assault one who is defenceless.*

Persons of rank gain no glory by these unequal combats: indeed, thus to attack men, deprived by respect and fear of the power of defence, and even of the privilege of complaint, is, in itself, disgraceful. The practice is as cruel, also, as it is dishonourable; for the elevated station of the assailant gives double force to his shafts, and deepens the wounds which they inflict; while the servile approbation, and malignant sneers of the surrounding throng, infuse a venom which renders the hurt incurable.

7.—*To jest on religious subjects proves a defect of piety at heart.*

The intention of raillery is to point out, in an ingenious and striking manner, what is ridiculous in any subject, and to give a ludicrous appearance to what is not so: if this be true, can we believe that a person, who employs this weapon against religion, can be endued with its divine spirit? Religion claims our perfect veneration and love: do we then indeed venerate, do we love, the author of our being,—of our salvation,—if we are capable of making any thing which regards Him the object of pleasantry, and unmerited contempt? Are there not in the world sufficient subjects for raillery, without our presuming to attack *Him*, whose greatness ought to humble us in the dust; whose authority has a right to our unqualified obedience; whose inconceivable holiness, and purity, and justice, might well

fill us with awe and trembling! Could any but a satanic mind suggest the thought of pointing at *Him* its puny witticisms? Never, never can such an idea spring up in the heart, that is penetrated with His holy truths, that is faithful to His sacred precepts, that is subdued by His unspeakable mercies!

Scripture, is the rule of all our duties; the guide to Him, who enables us to perform them: if, then, we turn this into ridicule, shall we, afterwards, endeavour to follow the guide? or be careful to consult the rule?

Religion inspires too deep an interest, is of too awful an importance, to become the subject of pleasantries. Can any progress towards perfection be made by him, who lightly regards the only means by which it is attained? Can such a turn of mind prepare him for converse with the Angels of God? with the spirits of just men made perfect?

ON DISPUTATION.

1.

THE learned often make a controverted point of doctrine, or a contested fact, the subject of personal animosity.

In disputation, men first attack the arguments, and then the character of their opponents; exclamation and abuse succeed; all order is confounded; all authority despised; and the strength of the lungs is brought into play, rather than the powers of the understanding.

“ Disputes,” says Montaigne, “ ought to be prohibited and punished, like other verbal crimes.” A troop of vices muster at

their summons, and wave the banners of passion and malignity: to fight for diversion, merely, seems, to a civilized age, a remnant of barbarian pastimes.

How many errors has the spirit of disputation introduced into religion! how many wounds has it given to charity! how much doubt and mistrust has it instilled into the minds of men! A love of truth is the ostensible plea for the combat; pride supports it; and it terminates in anger. At each fresh argument, we consider, not whether the reasoning is just, but how we may confute it: we meet it, not as a friend, but, as an enemy.

A difference of opinion, between our associates and ourselves, should not irritate or offend either party, but call the mental powers of both into exertion: it should rouse attention, but not excite displeasure. We so often fluctuate in our own sentiments, that dissent from them, on the part of others,

ought not to occasion us surprise. Have not our companions an equal right with ourselves to form an independent opinion? Why, then, should we consider their use of this right, a just motive for anger? Still, as individuals, we are not adversaries! A weak argument will not gain strength from acrimony; nor an opponent be convinced by being insulted; neither will ill-humour point out the road to truth,—the final aim of every rational discussion.

2.—*In every argument, in which we may be engaged, our object should be, not to vex our opponents, but to gain information ourselves.*

If we were to combat the opinions of others, only with the intention of convincing them of the truth; and if, before entering the lists, we were to examine whether we possessed the various powers, and qualifi-

cations, necessary to ensure this desirable end; these contests, displaying as they would at once the difficulty of the task, and our incompetency for it, would be less frequent; they would occupy but little time, and employ few words. Disputes would, in this case, be conducted with more calmness and prudence, than is at present usual; greater advantages would be derived from them; and truth itself would not be overlooked in the eagerness of debate.

From the customary manner of carrying on an argument, it were natural to conclude, that its essence consisted in a spirit of contradiction. The cause of truth is too often abandoned, for an adherence to previous opinions; and the contest is ended with no change of sentiments on either side: our eyes have been open solely to the reasonings we have ourselves advanced; and, fearing to be convinced of the fallacy of some cherished opinion, we have closed

them to the light offered by our opponents. What injustice is this! what prejudice! what obstinacy!

Never discuss any point with intemperate warmth, but calmly judge each side of the question: if, by chance, you have been mistaken, instead of persisting in what is wrong, embrace the first opportunity of owning and renouncing your error, from whatever source you may derive your knowledge of it; and fear not thus to show, that you are wiser to-day, than you were yesterday.

If we persist in contradicting another, we give him reason to think that we consider his understanding to be inferior to our own. To escape this misconception, let us incline, as much as sincerity will permit, to his opinions; and shew pleasure when we can approve them: let us reflect, that a conviction having been entertained by any rational mind, is some plea in favor of

its truth ; and let us suffer opposition to our own judgment without indignation ; not valuing it, on all points, above that of every other person ; and remembering also, that to dispute for the sake of disputing is equally unamiable and absurd.

The man who, regardless of the honor of victory, argues solely for the elucidation of truth, will be careful not to involve the subject in a labyrinth of prefaces and digressions : if he advance a proposition, which he believes to be true, but which is rejected as false, he will reason thus with himself : “ May not this incredulity arise from some fault on my part ?—have I not expressed my meaning indistinctly, spoken unseasonably, or dogmatically ? and, have I sufficiently merited the esteem of my opponents to secure their belief in my assertions ? ” In this manner, not laying, when contradicted, the whole blame on others, and guarding against a too strong prepossession in favor

of his own arguments; he is able to listen impartially to what is urged on the adverse side.

Nothing is more graceful, than to bend to the majesty of truth, at her first appearance; nothing more worthy of praise, than faithfully to follow her footsteps, after having undesignedly wandered from them. To review our principles, to correct them, to abandon a wrong path in the full ardour of our career, evinces a noble, a philosophic, and, let me add, a christian spirit. Here we may prove the strength of our minds; the degree of empire we have acquired over ourselves;—here, also, may we ascertain whether, freed from the slavery of prejudice, we are at liberty to place ourselves under the guidance of reason and revelation. For it is not inconstancy, to quit an error when we have recognized it to be such; nor is it disgraceful, to change our sentiments, with the change of the object which inspired them.

3.—*Never suffer a trifle to become the cause of a serious dispute.*

A difference of opinion, on matters of little consequence, should be allowed to pass without animadversion: for we may every day observe, that trifles destroy the pleasure and advantage of conversation, by heating the temper of the disputants, and usurping the place of really important subjects. Very frequently, it is the opposition alone, that gives weight to things in themselves immaterial.

With the great, especially, disputes about trifles should be carefully avoided; since the injury to ourselves is certain, even should the victory be secured. A man in power is able to indemnify himself for mortification in a trivial matter, by humbling, in essential points, the antagonist who has caused it. Any resistance to that rage for universal sway, which burns in the

breasts of certain petty potentates, irritates and alarms them : and they have always at command, a force sufficient to overwhelm the hapless rebel. “ I never dispute with a Prince, who has twenty-four legions in his service”—said a Roman Philosopher to the Emperor Adrian.

The great are generally wedded to their own opinions, and maintain them with obstinacy, because those who approach them, overawed by their power, have seldom ventured to contradict them ; and being accustomed to continual applause, they imagine that reason is ever on their side. How pitiable is the prosperous man, who will listen only to the voice which flatters him ! to all the harmony of truth he must for ever remain a stranger !

4.—*Disputes would not be drawn out to great length, were it not, that it is a long time before people discover what they are disputing about.*

We are all liable to be so engrossed by our own opinions, so prejudiced in favour of our own arguments, as not to afford the time and attention requisite to weigh properly the reasonings of others. How many disputes subsist, solely, because the parties engaged in them have not understood, or do not chuse to understand, what is alleged on the opposite side. He, who is wilfully deaf, rushes headlong on his way; on him, the most persuasive arguments lose their power; the voice of the charmer charms in vain, for, he listens to no voice but his own.

Owing to this deficiency of mutual attention, objections are so ill-answered, that the person who has advanced them, feels

himself called on to enlarge, and explain, in the hope of rendering his meaning intelligible; while the person he addresses, intent on objecting in his turn, rather than on replying to the objector, misunderstands the scope of the argument; and is, consequently, incomprehensible to the first speaker, who has been equally inattentive with himself. Thus, after much loss of time and pains, the subject remains wrapped in its original obscurity; and each partizan returns home, more obstinately prejudiced than before in favor of his own opinions; and more firmly believing them defensible, because they have been so long defended.

5.—*Some people estimate the validity of their arguments, by the number and pomp of their words.*

Disputants of this class hope to overwhelm their adversaries, by opening on them

the floodgates of their eloquence; or, at least, to crush them beneath the ponderous weight of their enunciation! The weak mind, which yields to every shock, and is carried away by every tide, may, indeed, be overpowered by this artifice; but men of firmer spirit regard circumlocution and bombast as jugglers' tricks, which, though they mislead the senses, do not deceive the understanding: and the sonorous harangue of the empiric is echoed only by the laughter of the wiser portion of his auditors.

6.—*Sudden and persevering silence, in the midst of a dispute, is no mark of discretion, or good breeding.*

There is a certain set of men, who, when they perceive they have the worst side of an argument, adopt the wily method of stopping obstinately short, just at the critical point of the debate; with provoking

arrogance assuming a contempt of their adversaries; or with affected modesty declining the discussion. But such men should remember, that vanity never willingly submits to deprivations; and always indemnifies herself for them to the utmost of her power. To be unable to answer, is, indeed, mortifying; yet, he, who hopes, by sullen silence, to intimate that he disdains to speak, or that nothing can be added more convincing than what he has already advanced, should be reminded, that while he remains blindly wrapped in self-complacency, the reasons of his retreat are universally perceived; and the shafts of ridicule directed at him from every hand.

It is astonishing that any man can thus delude himself, though sensible that he instantly discerns such motives, when they actuate another: but, unfortunately, he ascribes the discovery to his own extraordinary penetration! A little reflection on the

deceptive properties of self-love will dispel our wonder, and may possibly lead us, when in similar circumstances, candidly to avow our present inability to reply.

This inability, however, should not lead us to receive the unconfuted argument as in itself incontrovertible; especially if its tendency be immoral, or irreligious: for some reasoner, more skilful than ourselves, may yet answer it to our satisfaction. Not obstinacy, in this case, but caution, will keep us in suspense, and our assent will be withheld by that sincere love for truth, which makes us watchful lest our ignorance betray us into a blamable credulity.

7.—*It is often not so much the contrariety of sentiment, which gives offence, as the violent, arrogant, or obstinate manner in which that contrariety is expressed.*

We listen willingly to the man, who mildly offers his reasons for differing from us in opinion: but should he second his arguments with passionate, or contemptuous gestures, he will excite an aversion and mistrust, that will prevent our perceiving the real excellence of what he has alleged.

Opposition to our sentiments is, in itself, sufficiently displeasing, without the infliction of any additional pain, by the manner in which it is conveyed: and that person will scarcely gain the suffrage of our understanding, who is careless how deeply he may wound and mortify our feelings.

8.—*We ought to be certain of the fact in question, before we dispute about its nature, or attendant circumstances.*

Disputes about uncertainties must be classed with those concerning trifles, and condemned as equally unprofitable.

It has been alleged in their favor, that all argument strengthens the reasoning faculties; but it must not be forgotten, that it also cherishes the unsocial spirit of contradiction. Can we not be content with those disquisitions, solely, which promote useful knowledge? our ignorance, we may rest assured, opens to them an unexplored and spacious field.

This reflection, is, perhaps, nearly as useless as the prohibited disputes; since so many persons have a private interest in supporting them, that the hope of their being generally laid aside must appear visionary. Yet, though it be of no service

to the public at large, it may benefit some individual, and lead him to decline all controversies, but those which affect the cause of truth and virtue; and involve questions, important to that cause.

“ How unstable, and ill-directed an agent is human reason!” says Montaigne. “ Men amuse themselves, rather in examining the appendages, than in ascertaining the reality of a fact: they pass over the premises, to scrutinize the consequences; and neglect the event itself, to investigate its cause. Their first question is: “ *How* did that happen?” instead of simply: Did that happen? the direct answer to which might often supersede all further discussion.”

Not that it is right, to deny an assertion flatly, even when we perceive that it has no just foundation; for we should grievously offend a large body of men, who do not scruple, in the most doubtful cases, to affirm, that they have themselves seen the

thing in question; and appeal to witnesses, whose authority silences contradiction, though it may not produce belief. Through their means, we have the privilege of learning the rise and progress of a thousand things, which never had existence.

So many subjects of profitable inquiry are actually before us, that we cannot too much discourage the waste of time incurred, by seeking the origin of fictitious beings and events; nor too openly discountenance those, who delight in sporting with the powers of the understanding, to the prejudice of sober truth.

ON OBSTINACY.

1.

***A**N obstinate person often persists in error, solely, because he has resolved never to yield.*

It is not always through ignorance, nor from a blindness to the light offered to them, that the obstinate refuse to be convinced; but from being predetermined to resist persuasion. The only means of leading them to acknowledge any truth, which they have once opposed, is to let them imagine that they owe its discovery to their own acuteness.

Much caution and address are requisite, in the management of an obstinate mind.

Averse from restraint, and restive by nature, it turns aside from the plain and open road, and can be impelled to the goal, only, by the stratagem of attempting to guide it in a contrary direction. The path he prefers, and has even entered, will be quitted by the obstinate man, as soon as it is recommended to him by another; because he chuses to show, that he is the sole arbiter of his own course.

No disposition can be so adverse to improvement, as that we are at present considering; for we have reason indeed to despair of him, who will not listen to the counsels of wisdom and experience.

The obstinate man, unconsciously, betrays both inordinate self-conceit, and an anxious regard to the opinion of the world; on the one hand, deeming himself possessed of superlative judgment; and, on the other, constantly apprehensive lest he should be thought to need assistance or advice.

2.—*Silence is the wisest measure that we can adopt, in our intercourse with the obstinate.*

When an obstinate man begins an argument, I would recommend to his circle of friends, that they preserve a profound silence. Experience may teach them, that no concessions to the cause of truth will be obtained, by reasoning with persons of this character, when once they have set themselves in opposition to it. Silence may produce a better effect than opposition, by affording time for the internal operations of their understanding; whereas, contradiction would only bind them to their previous opinions, and strengthen the unamiable tendency of their disposition.

ON THOUGHTLESSNESS.

1.

THOUGHTLESSNESS *is the source of a large proportion of the faults, committed in the intercourse of society.*

The thoughtless man is destitute of a quality, absolutely necessary to right conduct, in every situation of life : but he particularly betrays the deficiency, when engaged in conversation. He, who talks without having considered what he has to say, and anticipated its consequences, will, on subsequent reflection, feel ashamed of the various blunders, digressions, and ill-timed remarks that have escaped him. Often may old age be

seen, with circumspection by his side, turning over the register of youthful days, and seeking the records of that folly, which has planted untimely wrinkles on his brow.

2.—*A thoughtless person never learns the important art of listening.*

The inattention resulting from want of thought, prevents him from hearing one half of what has been addressed to him; and his answer, ill-adapted even to the moiety that has reached his ear, is consequently, unintelligible and absurd.

Hence, proceed most of the groundless reports, which perplex mankind, and in which invention has supplied, what was lost through heedlessness. The giddy listener, struck by some particulars of a story, and afterwards wishing to relate it, finds that his memory has not retained its principal circumstances; he therefore retails, in

their room, those with which his imagination presents him: for he cannot resolve to stop short in his recital; and he, too late, perceives that he embarked in it, unprovided with the information necessary to carry him through with credit.

Never then place dependence on a thoughtless man; he may have sentiments of probity, and even of religion, yet his predominant failing will render him unstable in the intercourse of life. With the best designs, he will prove a dangerous companion. His own affairs will be ruined by indiscretion, and want of precaution against the artifices of the world. So giddily does he run his race, that it will be difficult for his intimate associates to guard themselves from the effects of his ungoverned movements: life, fortune, reputation, all, are endangered by them.

The medicine to be prescribed for this mental disease, (after the patient has been

convinced that he is under its influence,) should be simply—contemplation on the fate of other heedless men.

Yes, and, no,—two very important words—should ever be preceded by reflection on the propriety and consequences of acquiescence, or refusal. The centinel, thus kept on the alert, would prevent those wanderings of the thoughts, from whence proceed innumerable, and most lamentable defects in action.

We must converse much with ourselves, if we would converse well with others: and we may remember, that *he* alone came off victor in the public games, who had prepared himself for them by private discipline.

ON COMPLIMENTS.

1.

THE customs of society authorize compliments, which should be restricted to what those customs require.

Though compliments are only exterior acts, in which the heart has no share, they should be received and returned with civility. They are ceremonies established by custom; and we ought not to make ourselves unnecessarily singular, by an opposition to them.

How many words, contrary to analogy, —how many ungrammatical constructions, are enrolled in our language, and must be used if we would speak intelligibly!

Ceremonious phrases do not deserve the epithet of deceptive; for every one knows, that custom alone authorizes them. It is vexatious, without doubt, to be obliged to utter so many words, foreign to our sentiments; and in some circumstances, it is more than vexatious.

An old author has said: “ What vanity, and waste of time, are observable in visits of ceremonious inquiry, salutations, and receptions; in offers, promises, and compliments! What exaggeration and hypocrisy do they convey, (perfectly understood as they are) to all who pay, receive, and hear them! One might imagine, there had been a mutual agreement between the parties, to deceive and play off each other. The person who knows that you tell him a falsehood, must make you a humble acknowledgment; whilst you, yourself, (fully aware that you are not believed) must preserve a countenance unchanged; mean-

while, both sides are watching for a plausible pretext, to get rid of the friends, they are so enchanted to meet." This is but too just a sketch: "all the world's a stage;" and every one who will tread it, must have his part to play.

How sweet is the liberty of that society, where christian benevolence forms the bond of union, and furnishes the criterion of politeness! Whilst we live with men, we must conform to such of their customs, as are followed by the wise and good among them. The elegant introduction of compliments, is an ornament to conversation, from which the most scrupulous adherent to truth need not entirely refrain; since they deceive no person, and pass only for their real value. We should be careful, however, not to use them to excess: for some people are troublesome from too much complaisance, and ill-bred from an overstrained civility. A profusion of compliments ex-

cites mistrust, and leads us to suspect the complimenter of a disposition to insincerity; unless the disadvantages of his education allow us to consider them, as a defect in taste, rather than in principle; as errors of the head, rather than deceptions of the heart.

ON PRAISE.

1.

ENLIGHTENED and judicious praise,
is exquisitely sweet.

A great number of people extol, rather what is commended by the generality of their acquaintance, than what is in itself commendable; and, thus, disparage their own judgment, and confer no honour on the subject of their eulogy.

A delicate mind can be flattered only by that praise, which is the expression of genuine feeling; and such, alone, can excite its gratitude, or animate its exertions. We should praise *what* we admire, and *because*

we admire, without awaiting the opinion of the public ; for the heartfelt commendation of a work of genius, or a virtuous action, proves a congeniality of spirit, in him, who is thus deeply sensible to their beauty. On the other hand, indiscriminate applause bespeaks a mind unexercised by the refined emotions of taste ; one, whose sincerity lies open to suspicion ; and from whose approbation, therefore, neither pleasure, nor encouragement can be derived.

Though N * * * * condescend to praise me, yet, when I recollect the panegyric, he has recently pronounced on one of his licentious friends, I must conceive myself insulted, rather than flattered ; for that testimony alone is honourable, which proceeds from persons, both deserving themselves of praise, and conscientious in the distribution of it.

2.—*It is invidious to praise a man for qualities, which do not belong to him.*

Praise a man for those things which are inseparable from himself, such as, the good sense and piety manifested by his conversation, temper, and conduct. These are just subjects of commendation; for man is a rational, and a religious being; he approaches perfection, in proportion as he becomes what his creator designed him, and is, in a corresponding degree, worthy of approbation.

But, to extol a man for qualities, of which he is destitute, is to convey a sarcastic reproof of his real character; and to intimate, that nothing deserving of praise is discoverable in it. Unmerited commendation bears a concealed sting; it is “censure in disguise:” yet even this *may* prove a stimulus to exertion, and a spur to actions worthy of unfeigned applause: for the law of

nature extends to moral government; and there is a balm to be extracted from every poison.

3.—*Those who feel reluctant to bestow commendation, are generally unworthy to receive it.*

Men, who are conscious of a want of merit in themselves, are ever unwilling to acknowledge its existence in others. The encomiums, in which they coldly acquiesce, that they may not incur the charge of envy, awaken a painful feeling of inferiority, and often of self-reproach.

Praise is, confessedly, a tribute due to merit; and public interest is concerned, in the faithful payment of it. Materially does it contribute to the advancement of the fine arts, and the liberal sciences, by exciting emulation among those who cultivate them. Well-timed praise has often cheered the

drooping heart, and given courage and animation to the diffident: it has led many a man to exact from himself, what he saw others expected from him; and, whilst intent on preserving the reputation he had already acquired, he has added to it unexpected lustre.

Let me further observe, that liberal and judicious praise is beneficial, likewise, to the persons who bestow it; cherishing in them a spirit of candour and equity, and inducing a disposition to practise themselves, what they have applauded in another.

4.—*Those who commend indiscriminately, with no further view than to give pleasure, sacrifice their judgment, to a mistaken sense of politeness.*

When we have no higher aim, than to please in society, by the praises we bestow, our taste insensibly loses its correctness;

and we become unreasonably prepossessed in favour of whatever object we may have undertaken to eulogize. Being determined, at all events, to say something gratifying, imagination is called on to suggest a specious pretext for commendation: and the judgment is, thereby, finally warped, and made the dupe of a false species of complaisance.

This is particularly the case, when we persist in extolling a person, evidently destitute of every title to applause; for we then draw on ourselves a degree of ridicule, proportioned to the absurdity of the attempt; and, whilst endeavouring to conciliate the favour of one individual, we forfeit the good opinion of a very large circle. Our only partisan will be the person we have flattered; nor will even his esteem be sincere: for in vain is truth outwardly violated; internally, her rights must ever be acknowledged.

5.—*Men listen to nothing more willingly, than to their own praise; and to nothing less patiently, than to the praise we give ourselves.*

The pleasure excited by well-merited praise is so natural, and so closely allied to the finer feelings of the mind, that we must not pretend to be insensible to it, though we should carefully guard against indulging in it to excess. Do we not see fortune, and life itself, hazarded to obtain it? “O, Athenians!” exclaimed Alexander, “could you but know what I suffer to gain your applause!” and many a bosom still sympathises with the Macedonian Hero! What heart, but would beat high at the sound: “There He is!—there is the famous Commander, who has gained as many victories, as he has fought battles! There is the man, who adds to the charm of polished manners, a profound and extensive knowledge of the

sublimest sciences: the man, ever humble in the midst of honours, paid rather to his merit, than his rank! There is the true Philanthropist, upright, and disinterested, who acquired wealth without injustice, dispensed it without ostentation, and resigned it without a murmur: whose fortune was employed, less in promoting his own convenience, than in supplying the wants of others; who denied himself even innocent pleasures, that he might impart them the more liberally."

What man of sensibility could hear, with indifference, such a testimony to his talents, and his virtues. Indeed, the stimulus of praise is found to be so powerful, that the person, who has acquired the good opinion of the world, by some particular feature of his character, will often labour assiduously to gain the approbation, withheld from him on other points: feeling that, without it, the fame he has already obtained is defective, and unsatisfactory.

It is then clear, that men listen most willingly to the praises given to themselves: I have further to hint, that they listen very reluctantly to those we bestow on our own character and conduct.

The measure of self-admiration which we discover, fixes the degree of general contempt which we incur: for, how high soever be our merit, it sinks at the voice of self-applause; which debases every virtue, and converts every charm into a source of ridicule, or disgust. When, therefore, a man extols his own virtues, he must not expect his companions to join him in the theme: they will take it for granted, that he can acquit himself without their aid.

6.—*Praise is too often bestowed from interested motives.*

Praise is sometimes given, less with a view to the honour of others, than to personal

interest. It is a species of delicate flattery, skilfully concealed, which gratifies, in different ways, both him who offers, and him who accepts it: the latter considering it as a reward of his merit; the former, as a means of displaying elegance of language, or acuteness of discernment.

Some give praise, in order to receive praise in return; others, to open the road to preferment; one man, to escape from an embarrassing situation; another, to procure a particular enjoyment! yet, most people welcome eulogium, as if their individual celebrity were its only object.

They, must be completely blinded by vanity, who are taken in such snares; and perceive not, that the same spirit which led these flatterers to applaud, will lead them also to vilify, when, by so doing, they can forward their own interests. The basest of mankind will be extolled beyond the idol of the present moment; and the testimony,

which could not be refused to acknowledged merit, will be poisoned by malignant remarks on some accompanying defect, with the hope, thereby to dim the lustre, previously conferred.

The best policy is, to avoid all acquaintance with persons of this description; lest, after having praised us to a ludicrous excess, they should proportionably blacken our character, in revenge for our having withheld the recompense they expected; or, with a view to being handsomely rewarded by our enemies.

7.—*We may generally believe that man to be sincere in bestowing praise, who ventures to find fault, when we seriously deserve blame.*

This is so true, that those, who wish to flatter delicately, often criticize some trifling defect, to give an air of sincerity to their commendations. But, with the exception

of this artifice, an open reprehension of what is wrong, is the best pledge a man can offer, to assure us, that the praises he bestows are the genuine dictates of his heart.

It is much to be wished, that the undisguised opinion were always given: excellence would be more ardently sought, if it were sure of obtaining justice; and vice would be out of countenance, when it beheld the number of its adversaries.

8.—*Seek not for praise, seek only to deserve it.*

The nature of man is so capricious, that we betray our dignity, and our repose, when we make them dependant upon human approbation. Let us, without being solicitous about praise, act in such a manner, as to deserve it.

Vanity, alas! leads to sad delusions; it mistakes the smoke for the flame; the sha-

dow for the substance ! To rest our peace of mind upon the opinions of the vulgar ;—voluntarily to resign our tastes, to their fancies ;—and regulate our affections, by their likings ;—to admire virtue, only when it pleases the populace ;—and to seek wisdom and goodness, not from love to their Supreme Author, but, for the sake of reputation solely, is unworthy of a man ! inconsistent in a christian !

Unhappily, even the virtue, which deserves praise, may be eventually undermined by it. Fenelon has admirably said : “ I shun praise, not that I dislike it, especially when given by persons of discernment, but, that I fear to like it too well. It corrupts the heart, making a man full of himself, vain, and presumptuous. Our aim should be, to deserve praise, yet to avoid it : that which is just, having its dangers, as well as that which is unmerited ; since the desire to obtain it, insensibly supplants better motives of action.”

The worst of mankind have extorted the loudest plaudits; and shall a noble mind crave an incense, which has been thus prostituted? Valuable praise is that, alone, which is bestowed unsolicited, and, by its object, unheard. He who sincerely esteems us, will believe us desirous of being humble, and fearful of becoming vain; he will, if he respect us, be sparing of his commendation, lest it should imply that he thought us greedy of praise. When well-earned, it is indeed soothing, but a right mind will feel less pleasure in receiving the approbation of man, than in aspiring after that of God.

9.—*We insult them, whom we attempt to praise, if we are regardless of delicacy in offering the incense.*

However vain the heart may be, we are all ashamed of being suspected of vanity. Now, we bring a conviction of this weak-

ness home to a man's bosom, or at least, evidently impress it on the minds of his companions, when we praise him without reserve and delicacy. He will rather feel indignant, at the discovery of his latent failing, than grateful, for the homage we indiscreetly proffer.

Vanity cannot bear to be drawn from her intrenchments; she finds it but too difficult, at all times, to conceal and defend herself: praise should, therefore, appear involuntary; and rather sue for pardon, than claim acknowledgment.

10.—*Judicious praise ever preserves a just proportion to its object.*

Extremes should be avoided, in this case, as in every other: a giant must not be diminished to a dwarf, nor a dwarf be stretched into a giant. We appear to doubt the reality of the merit, which we commend but

sparingly; whilst, on the other hand, exaggerated praises awaken a jealous curiosity, and give a spur to envy.

If the character do not correspond to the glowing description given of it, the general feeling of society revolts against the imposition; and both the panegyrist, and his theme, are treated with ridicule, or regarded with contemptuous pity. But justly proportioned praise, like elegant, and well arranged drapery, gives pleasure to those who examine it, and neither loads, nor embarrasses, him to whom it belongs.

11.—*Regard should be paid to the persons, who hear our eulogiums, as well as to those who receive them.*

When one of our companions is reciting the productions of his own muse, it would be ill-breeding, to launch forth in the praises of a superiour poet, however justly admi-

rable; as it would imply a censure of the less happy effusions before us. The commendations bestowed on a successful candidate, in the presence of his disappointed rival, are highly injudicious; as well as those, conferred, in the hearing of a friend, on the man who has done that friend an injury.

12.—*Those, who are excessively fond of praise, cannot bear a partner in their fame.*

A man, avaricious of praise, can neither endure to commend another himself, nor to hear him commended by the public. Every such eulogium appears to him a fraud, committed on his own reputation. This repugnance, he wishes the world to consider, as arising from a jealous regard to truth: but may not the assertion be doubted, by those, who observe that he feels neither anger, nor surprise, at being himself extolled far beyond

his merits; or, even for qualities, to which he has not the slightest claim? The fact is, whatever excellence may be ascribed to him, he had previously flattered himself that he possessed a still greater portion: and if he appear sometimes to decline the praise which is really his due, he does so, with a design to secure a larger share, as a tribute to his modesty; or, to exempt himself from the necessity of bestowing similar encumbrances, on his yet more meritorious neighbour.

ON FLATTERY.

THE first person, who flatters a man, is—himself.

We flatter ourselves, before any one else presumes to flatter us. When we are so far prepossessed in favour of our own talents, conduct, and opinions, as to think them less exposed to failure, or to error, than those of our fellow mortals; are we not evidently self-flattered? What more would a pensioned sycophant venture to insinuate? He could but attribute superlative wisdom to our actions, and benevolence to our sentiments: and, candidly, do we not wish, that

such should be the prevailing opinion of our character? These wishes, then, are avenues, thrown open to designing parasites; and many are, by interest, induced to enter them. The gates are never absolutely closed: whatever we may pretend, some narrow opening is always left, to admit food for our craving vanity.

But, let us listen to the flatterer's soliloquy, and hear the language, common to his species!

“The versatility of my genius, and the grace of my concessions, have won the hearts of these vain simpletons: they are completely in my power. Being thus eminently gifted, shall I not profit by the weakness of mankind? A thirst for admiration, and groundless pride, expose them as my prey. They *wish* to be deceived. I therefore flatter their vices, encourage their follies, enter into their passions. If they are joyous, I imitate their joy;—if sorrowful,

I appear still more dejected. They cannot live without me ; and I enslave them to my will, enchain them to my opinions. Thus, do I subsist on the folly of the great ! This is the portal, by which I enter the gilded palace of Fortune ! It is true, I have not houses or lands myself, but then, I know how to flatter those who have ! This is my estate. Though the revenue may be somewhat variable, the property is secure. The vanity of man will never fail."

To such degradation are we subjected, by the delusions of *self-love*,—that arch deceiver !

Flatter not yourself, and no one will dare to flatter you. It is your evident wish, to pass in the world for something beyond your fellows, that encourages a train of servile adulators to persuade you, that you are actually such.

The passion for flattery renders conversation, in many circles, an interchange of

fulsome and insincere professions. Men flatter, in order to be flattered; and grow giddy with the incense mutually offered: they deck the vices of their companions in the robe of virtue, that they may cover their own sins with the same garment. To deceive is politeness:—to be deceived, pleasure. Truth, if humiliating, must be banished, and falsehood will be welcome in her stead.

The love of flattery is an insurmountable barrier in our progress towards perfection. By viewing our faults under a specious disguise, and never permitting a friend to show them to us, in their native deformity, we learn to think, that it is not material to correct them. It is better to be passed over in total silence, than to be too highly praised: the first exposes us to no real injury, while the last, as we have before observed, brings many serious evils in its train. Flattery, far from benefiting the

character, destroys the good it finds. Deep self-knowledge is our best, our only, antidote against its baneful influence: it converts the poisoned waters into a pure and healthful stream, and bids us view, in the fair image it presents, only a model of what we *ought* to be.

2.—By flattering the great, on their imaginary perfections, parasites render them blind to their real deficiencies.

None flatter themselves so much as the great; and, consequently, none expect so much flattery from others. The higher their rank, the larger is the portion of adulation they demand. Dissatisfied with the advantages of power alone, they seek the stimulus of general admiration; and soon show themselves formidable to him, who neglects to offer the homage they require. Holding in their hands both chastisement and recom-

pense, they secure the incense of all, whose assiduities wait on the call of fear, or interest: these, cherish their vices by unprincipled compliance; throw the colouring of virtue over actions, which have neither its motives, nor its constancy; and veil the form of truth, lest her aspect should offend. They incur the guilt of rendering their patrons finally incorrigible, by persuading them they are immaculate.

Flatterers are, therefore, worse than those they flatter. Their servility is the principal support of pride, and intolerance, in those above them: it destroys modesty; and fosters a vain glorious dependance upon wealth and titles. By long custom, this excitement becomes so necessary, that were it to be withdrawn, the slaves of vanity would stoop to crave the suffrage of the crowd; and solicit them to contemplate their prosperity, lest it become insipid. Of what use would be the sumptuous repast, were there none to

partake of, and extol it? To the master, it is generally tasteless; abundance having, in him, produced satiety. Of what avail would be the magnificent palace, and the costly furniture, if no one came to gaze? These things do not please from their intrinsic worth; but from the estimation in which they are held by the world; and the opinion entertained, that he is happy, who possesses them.

Sycophants have, in all ages, carried their complaisance to the most ridiculous excess. Philip of Macedon being obliged, on account of a wound, to wear a bandage round his head, the greater number of his courtiers immediately appeared with correspondent wrappings.

Dionysius the younger, was near-sighted, and his attendants, to assimilate themselves to their master, affected to be also half-blind; jostling each other, and stumbling at every step.

The delight taken by Mithridates in surgical operations, induced his favourites to offer their limbs (though perfectly sound) for his incision and experiments.

The flatterers of Plato imitated his high shoulders; those of Aristotle, the impediment in his speech; and the courtiers of Alexander the Great, held their heads on one side, and counterfeited the hoarseness of their monarch's voice.

Nothing is so insipid as the thorough-paced parasite, who echoes, without distinction, truth and falsehood; sense and nonsense! "In mercy! for once, say, 'no' that I may be certain we are two separate beings:" said the orator Coelius, to a man of this class.

"Who smiles on all, obliges none."

But, the worst point in the conduct of flatterers is, the praise they bestow on vice. They suggest reasons to justify injustice; and scruple not to furnish pretexts, and

devise means, for the gratification of every passion. When Cambysis laid before the Persian Council, his desire to espouse his own sister, they replied; that, in truth, they could not find a law, which definitely permitted such a marriage, but, that there was one, which gave the sovereign license to do whatever he might please.

Unhappy he, who, raised above the rest of mankind, cannot view the truth with his own eyes. Every one is interested to deceive him. Every one, under the semblance of zeal for his glory, hides private schemes of ambition: all profess attachment to his person, but are attracted, only, by the preferment he bestows: indeed, so little is he really beloved, that, to obtain his favours, they flatter, and betray him.

Phœdra, (in the tragedy of Racine) stiles flatterers, “the most fatal present, which Heaven, in wrath, could make to Kings.” Let us pity the delusions of the great, whilst

we detest the meanness of their betrayers. Which of us can say, that he should be more faultless than his sovereign, had he been, like him, surrounded from infancy by parasites?

The best defence against these insidious enemies is, to repress, by a candid avowal of our defects, the pride which their flattery is calculated to raise: and publicly to withdraw all hope of advancement from him, who persists to employ it. Of all praise, the noblest, is, to wish our perfections to remain unknown! Never are they so free from contamination, as when not subjected to the breath of human applause.

3.—*It is often with a view to screen our own defects, that we flatter those of our friends.*

By glossing over the faults of others, men hope to obtain indulgence for their own.

This course of exchange, however, does not produce solid advantage. It cherishes no virtue, on the one side, whilst it sinks the other into contempt. Let us recall our own sensations towards those, whom we have seen revelling in the sweets of flattery; and we shall conceive justly, what will be felt towards ourselves, if we yield to their allurements.

4.—*We must be careful, lest a contempt for the arts of flattery, lead us into the opposite extreme, of coarseness.*

Many persons, in avoiding one kind of excess, fall into that of a contrary nature: to preserve the just medium, is certainly difficult. It is right, never to flatter vice; but never to commend virtue, is wrong. Not to give excellence the praise it deserves, is, tacitly to discourage it: or to bear the appearance of being jealous of the worth, to which we refuse our suffrage.

We may remark, that those persons, who are withheld, by affected delicacy of conscience, from shedding around them the refreshing dew of encouragement, are yet, seldom scrupulous of embittering the cup of life, by the severity of sarcastic animadversions.

I.

FALSHOOD excites the anger of God, and the contempt of man. Falseness is an subject vice, mostly the effect of cowardice; and, as such, has in universal contempt. He, who is guilty of it, whilst he betrays a distasteful fear of his fellow-mortals, proves that he fears not his, and their Creator. Regardless of the divine knowledge of his most secret thoughts, and most skilful witness, he dares to violate truth; and, thereby, to prove the God of truth himself; and to become the object of his indignation: for, has he not

FALSEHOOD.

1.

FALSEHOOD *excites the anger of God, and the contempt of man.*

Falsehood is an abject vice, mostly the effect of cowardice; and, as such, held in universal contempt. He, who is guilty of it, whilst he betrays a disgraceful fear of his fellow-mortals, proves that he fears not his, and their Creator. Regardless of the divine knowledge of his most secret thoughts, and most skilful artifices, he dares to violate truth; and, thereby, to brave the God of truth himself; and to become the object of his indignation: for, has he not

declared, that all false ways are utterly abhorrent to him?

Falsehood is so insuperably odious, that even those who are addicted to it themselves, cannot endure it in another: and truth is so lovely, so congenial to our nature, that its rights are always acknowledged, however wantonly they may be infringed. An internal voice, never to be wholly silenced, reproves the delinquent, and would recall him to his duty, were it not overpowered by the violence of the passions.

By frequent deviations from the truth, our perception of it is finally destroyed: hence result contradictory reasonings, inconsistent conduct, projects without execution, and enterprizes without plan or order. The first symptom of a corruption in morals, is, the habitual violation of truth. No sin is stained with a deeper dye, than this, which renders us traitors to our own hearts, and outcasts from God and man.

2.—*The obvious tendency of falsehood is, to destroy the mutual confidence of society.*

Much pain is always occasioned us, by the perception of having been deceived; and the author of our deception immediately becomes despicable in our eyes. No reliance can again be placed on him, whose words and heart have once been found discordant.

Speech forms the universal medium, for the communication of our ideas and wishes. It is the interpreter of the soul; the golden chain which connects man with man; he, who warps this chain, impedes the progress of human knowledge; he, who breaks it, dissolves the charm of private union, and snaps the bands of public faith.

ON BOASTING.

1.

THE lowest degree of courage, often assumes the most lofty tone of pretension.

A man boasts of his feats, that he may extort from the world the good opinion, of which he is fearful it will deem him undeserving; and his evident apprehension on this point, excites a strong suspicion of his prowess. Experience teaches us, that a braggadocia is always less valiant in deeds, than he is in words; and the old adage of the sonorous cask, recurs much to his disadvantage.

Words, only *assert* that a man is brave; actions, *prove* him to be so. The real hero, therefore, never boasts of his achievements: they have spoken for themselves, and superseded the necessity of his bringing them into notice.

He who is persuaded, that his wonderful recitals have already made him an object of general admiration, will not seek to establish a character by engaging in any difficult enterprize. It is natural to take the shortest and smoothest road, which we imagine will lead to the end desired. The path chosen by the boaster will, however, be found to turn *from* the temple of fame; and his song of triumph will not often be mistaken for the echo of her trumpet. He obtains, indeed, for a moment, his wish of occupying public attention, but, it is only, subsequently, to suffer disgrace, proportioned to his arrogant pretensions. It is the common misfortune of what has been highly extolled, to fall

short of the degree of perfection expected; for it costs little, to image to the mind exalted virtues; though it costs much, to acquire them. A boastful spirit is as inconsistent with the rules of prudence, as with the precepts of religion: whilst people add willingly to the reputation, which obtrudes no claim to distinction, they jealously detract from the commendation that is self-bestowed.

To act virtuously, is our part; to exalt our virtues, and bring them into notice, is the part of others: whether, or not, they acquit themselves of this duty, is a point for which they alone are responsible.

2.—*Whoever boasts of the good he has done, gives the world reason to believe, that he did it with a view to gain admiration.*

Silence, respecting a good action recently performed, like a judicious shade in paint-

ing, greatly heightens its brilliancy. We love to draw forward the merit, which seeks concealment; and feel bound to do it that justice, which it denies itself. Reputation pursues the retiring character, to bestow on it the honours due to virtue.

Just the contrary befalls the ostentatious man. His deeds of beneficence, having, evidently, the gratification of his vanity for their motive, receive no further recompense than his own applause: and, even while the utility of the action is allowed, the views of its author meet with universal censure. Every one admired the conduct of a certain commander; whilst they heard of it from his comrades only; but it has met the smile of general contempt, since he has made it the subject of his own commendation. The fact is not disputed: no one dares deny it; but it is attributed to degrading motives. He designed to increase his glory; and he has forfeited the fame, which silence would have preserved.

Our good deeds should be concealed, as much as is consistent with the scriptural precept, “to let our light shine before men:” and here we are not left ignorant, *to whom* the glory is to be given.

3.—*Vaunting professions, are seldom followed by actions of importance.*

The boastful man would fain persuade his friends, that he has power to serve them, at the very time that, evidently, he can do nothing for himself. He is on a footing with the mountebank, who pretends to invaluable secrets, whilst he remains in poverty and rags. The man high in his own conceit, and desirous of being high in that of the multitude, is enchanted, when he sees his levée crowded with the votaries of fortune; who hope, by his means, to obtain her favours. These he promises as confidently, as if the blind goddess had appointed him her almoner.

When his present dupes are undeceived, he will delude a second circle. Unhumbled by conscious inability, he believes those, to whom his own deference is paid, as little deserving homage as himself. One might almost fancy, it was a conviction of the emptiness of worldly honours, that made him deem hollow promises alone, sufficient to be given in exchange for them. His artifices, for a while, mislead those, who want penetration, and enlargement of mind, to grasp the whole of things, and view them as they really are; those, who are dazzled by all that sparkles, and at the mercy of all who choose to lead them: and thus a band of simpletons is formed, to join the chorus which he raises to his own renown. Where ease, or interest is consulted, men (far from boasting of influence, which they do not possess,) usually conceal the extent of their real credit; that they may escape the importunity of a numerous tribe, who can ask favours without an effort, or a blush.

4.—*The man addicted to boasting, is usually found to be precipitate in his decisions.*

The same turn of mind, which leads a man into the first fault, will generally influence him in the second instance. He will fear that, by prudent deliberation, he might compromise the sagacity, to which he had laid claim.

But those, whom his arrogance has piqued, will humble these high pretensions: their decisive tone denotes a spirit, too imperious to be beloved. Hasty and peremptory decision, the characteristic of ignorance, or immaturity of judgment, break themselves, by their own violence, against the obstacles which they encounter; and finally subside in the low murmurings of discontent.

ON CALUMNY.

1.

SO general is the prevalence of calumny, that no person should expect to escape its baneful influence.

Men hold nothing so dear as reputation; and purchase it at the expense of repose, of fortune, and even of life itself; yet no other possession is so constantly, so inevitably, exposed to danger. The high and the low, the young and the old, the good and the wicked, alike lie open to the piercing shafts of calumny.

This demon presides at a tribunal, where, not actions alone, but the very intentions of

the heart are scrutinized ; where the noblest characters are regarded as the choicest prey ; where innocence is aspersed, and truth suspected ! By her nefarious arts, she raises the phantom of vice, where it has no existence ; and deprives virtue of “ all visible form and lineament.” One instance of hypocrisy detected, is, in her hands, a spell to destroy all belief in real piety. Should reflection, or dear-bought experience, lead a young man from the heartless dissipation of the world, to a rational and religious course of life ; or should a young woman renounce folly and luxury, for useful employment, and christian moderation, the reform is malignantly ascribed to caprice, to vanity, or, as a last resource, to pecuniary embarrassment.

When conversation flags, a scandalous anecdote can always renew its animation. How few withhold their countenance ! How few, even of those who profess religious

principles, scruple to spread the tale, and thus to render it more cruel, and more pernicious! A conduct, this, equally invidious, unchristian, and inhuman!

Alas! were we created but to torment, and to destroy each other? Envy, injustice, treachery, cruelty, are the baneful ingredients of a poison, administered with so unsparing, so remorseless a hand!

Blessed by thousands were that authority, which should impose silence on the calumniator; and establish penalties against slander, as severe as those, which exist against theft, or murder! And guiltless, on this point, is he, only, who exerts every power he possesses, for a correspondent end; and, by looks of displeasure, or animated exculpation, shows himself actuated by a spirit, that "rejoices not in iniquity."

2.—*The malignant slanderer would injure his fellow creatures by deeds, as much as he does by words, had he equally the power to do so.*

But, is not defamation among the most serious injuries that can be sustained? and, unhappily, the calumniator needs no preparation to accomplish his malicious purpose. His envenomed sting is ever at his command; and the wounds it inflicts are equally agonizing and incurable. Even supposing him repentant, can he recall the story, which has circulated through a hundred mouths, and imbibed fresh malignity at every repetition? The partakers in his guilt are, many of them, unknown to him; they will never come within his sphere; and his crime is increased, by the impossibility of making reparation to the victims of it.

3.—*The calumniator hopes, by speaking ill of his neighbour, to counterbalance the evil reports, in circulation respecting himself.*

This hope will prove deceptive: those whom he defames will indeed be accounted guilty; but he will not, therefore, be himself esteemed innocent. Laying aside partiality, let him judge merely from experience. Has his own perception of a friend's misconduct, been ever lessened, by severe reflections from that friend, upon the conduct of another person?

Our behaviour would be more reasonable than it is, could we but see what passes in the breasts of those, who are observing us. Now, this penetration is not so difficult, as we may at first imagine. We need only fancy ourselves in the place of our associates, and we may justly conceive their sentiments, by what passes within ourselves. We shall not then hope, by bringing forward

the defects of our companions, to throw our own into the back ground: being sensible, that, far from overlooking the faults of a traducer, we do not pardon him his detraction.

The precept, so consonant to our nature, “to do to others, what we would they should do to us,” binds us to show candour towards our neighbour, and requires him to show the same indulgence towards us. Those whom the divine injunctions cannot restrain from the hateful vice we are considering, may tremble, lest they should be taught its cruelty, by the anguish of wounded self-love; lest their own sufferings instruct them, that it probes the soul in the part most acutely sensitive: till, feelingly convinced of the benevolence of the command, they own the heinous guilt of having infringed it.

ON OATHS.

1.

PROBITY, is far better security, than an oath.

If a sense of equity do not prevent deviations from the truth, it will not prevent the violation of an oath. Whoever has adopted a system of deceit, does not hesitate, to give any outward demonstration of sincerity, that may be demanded. An oath is, in his estimation, merely a snare for the scrupulous.

Why should we exact an oath, from a man of honour? Can we have a surer pledge than his veracity? Being ever faith-

ful to his engagements, he would, without the security we require, be incapable of departing from his word. And, why should we exact on oath, from the unprincipled? Can we believe, *that* man will reverence a solemn asseveration, who disregards all other religious obligations?

2.—*Bind yourself by no vows, but those made at the font, or at the altar.*

An oath should be resorted to, only, on occasions of the highest importance. When used unnecessarily, it implies, that we are conscious our simple word does not deserve belief; and a habit of heedlessly making solemn asseverations, shows a culpable disregard of their sacred nature.

Indifference, and inattention, are the usual consequences, of any action becoming habitual. This is perpetually exemplified by those, who have accustomed themselves to

the use of oaths. The bare mention of the most palpable and unquestioned fact, or the slightest emotion of anger, or of gaiety, leads them, immediately, to the practice of this sin; though they profess to have no design, whatever, in committing it.

Oaths serve the reprobate as convenient interludes in conversation. Whether they speak, or swear, may be, to them, indifferent; but it is *not* so, to their auditors; in whom, if any sensibility to what is sacred exist, the utmost disgust will be excited. Wanton invocations of the Deity, give the taint of profaneness to what is, still, acknowledged to be true; and clothe what is false, in the additional horrors of perjury.

ON PROMISES.

1.

*I*N all you promise, let these conditions be understood: if it be in your power, and consistent with your duty.

Though nothing is more amiable, than the love of giving pleasure, discretion forbids our indulging the inclination, so far, as to make a promise, without having consulted both our ability, and our duty. Excessive eagerness to oblige, or extreme reluctance to refuse, may entangle us in promises, which will finally involve us in dishonour.

The person, who, in making a promise, is not regulated by a consideration of his

power to fulfil it, will, afterwards, be disgraced by the exposure of his weakness: and whoever is led by bashfulness, into engagements, which he cannot keep, will feel his embarrassment encreased, when his inability becomes apparent. The obligations of duty, also, should be previously examined, lest we draw greater injuries on ourselves, than we confer benefits upon our friends. Not he, who refuses solicitations to act unworthily, but he, who urges them, should feel confused; or, if the former blush, it should be, only, that he was deemed likely to acquiesce.

A promise should be held inviolable, in the following cases: when it is in our power to keep it: when it is not at variance with our religious principles: when it has been voluntarily made: and, when it will not injure him, to whom it was given.

In the observance of an engagement, inconveniences may arise, which could not be

forseen at the time it was contracted; and, to which it is not credible we should knowingly have exposed ourselves: justice then allows us, to demand our release. By promising less than is required, we are able to do more than is expected; and to bestow unhopd for pleasure, instead of inflicting disappointment..

2.—*He, who promises thoughtlessly, will, as thoughtlessly, break his promise.*

Promises, heedlessly given, soon escape the memory; but we shall not lightly violate those, which we have made with deliberation. Montaigne says: “I am delicate, in the observance of my promises even to superstition; and am ever inclined to leave them uncertain and conditional. Even engagements of a trifling nature, acquire weight with me, from my scrupulous adherence to my rule. A bond, drawn up and executed,

with all the formalities of law, binds me less closely, than my simple word."

We should cease to give promises inconsiderately, were we to hold it our duty thus conscientiously to fulfil them.

3.—In making a promise, men are frequently influenced by hope: in keeping it, too often, solely, by fear.

Do not rely on those promises, which derive their origin from hope, alone; but be prepared, when the expectation fails, to see the promise fail also. The deceptions of hope are attested by every heart; and fear, is a surety as little to be trusted; for, when its immediate pressure on the mind is removed, the promise, which depended on it, fades from the memory.

The degree of dependance to be placed on an engagement, should be determined by the nature of its motive: now hope, and fear,

form but an unstable basis for our confidence.

4.—*Men often promote their immediate interests, more by making promises, than by fulfilling them.*

For this reason, they, who grant favours with a sinister view, keep their dependants long in expectation. They know, that men are as cold, towards the good they have obtained, as they were ardent, in its pursuit; and, that their assiduous attentions, towards those, from whom they expect benefits, are usually remitted, when hope is absorbed in success.

A man of penetration, who knows the world, will not build upon promises affording but so vacillating a foundation for his plans. To him, the latent design, far different from the ostensible purpose, is fully apparent. He regards promises, as forming a

commerce of interest, well understood both by the patron, and the patronized. This selfishness inspires a generous mind with a strong aversion from the scene, in which it is epidemic; where it too often infects the most exalted virtues; allays the simplicity of their motive; and abates, or entirely represses, the gratitude they would otherwise excite.

ON THE CIRCULATION OF NEWS.

1.

IT is only by chance, that the habitual retailer of news relates what happens to be true.

A professed newsmonger vends only such articles, as accord with his own prejudices; and, for this reason: that he gives credit to none of a different description. Should the side he espouses, be favoured by fortune, then, indeed, it furnishes solid materials for his recitals, and he has no occasion to rove in quest of fiction.

But it must be observed, that it is not the military chief, or the political party, that en-

gages his support; most frequently it is, exclusively, the *source*, from whence his information is derived, that he invests with papal infallibility. He pledges himself, for the truth of its communications, as confidently, as if he had been an actor in the scenes described; and is indignant, if his auditors do not evince all the credulity which he demands. A few novices eagerly swallow his intelligence, and circulate it in fresh quarters: in this manner are events stated as authentic, which have no better authority, than the reports of a credulous coterie.

2.—*The established publisher of news identifies himself, with the events which he relates.*

This feeling of personal interest in his narration, adds to its energy, and to its audacity. A creature, who would have shrunk behind the ranks, nor even dared to look at danger; is seen to “glow with mar-

tial fires," beyond the veteran, who has risked life, and honour in the conflict. The well-formed design, the cautious stratagem, or daring enterprize become his own; and he demands for them the meed of admiration. In idea, he assumes the post of general, of minister, or even wields the regal sceptre. He justifies timidity, imprudence, or ambition; and, referring to his own judgment as a standard, pronounces that all is right. If, on the contrary, he disapprove, he asserts, with equal confidence, that, had *he* been of the council, affairs would have worn a brighter aspect: whilst his neighbours silently bless themselves, and rejoice that the enthusiast, is, in this case, as powerless, as he is ignorant.

3.—*Good news, or bad, are equally welcome to the man, whose delights all centre in the gazette.*

With such an one, the springs of life are kept in action, but by the public papers. To procure and disseminate news, forms his whole avocation, and is the source of all his self-importance.

As we every day see men, calmly carrying on their professions, however annoying they may prove to their neighbours; so, he, who lives on the circulation of news, disquiets not himself, as to the effects produced by it on his countrymen. The domestic distress, to numberless individuals, which always follows in the train of splendid victories, might make a mind of any sensibility shrink from the office of announcing them. Too soon, alas! will they produce their sad effects; and every hour of ignorance is, to the unconscious sufferers, an hour stolen from the dominion of heart-rending grief.

4.—*The man, immersed in fancied regulation of state affairs, often leaves those of his own family in sad disorder.*

Occupied in adjusting the balance of contending kingdoms, in the superintendence of foreign embassies, the investigation of financial schemes; can he contract his ideas to the fairy circle of home-born joys? Can he listen to the details of domestic management, or stoop to the conversation of his wife, and the prattle of children? The improvement of a narrow income is too trivial a concern, for one, who conceives his fate bound up with that of empires! He shares the hopes and fears of royal breasts, and, in the visionary sympathy, expends the time, and thought, and care, that might have spread comfort, throughout his neglected family.

ON REPORTS.

1.

***BE** equally cautious in believing, and in circulating a report.*

When we consider the innumerable mischiefs, which arise from a habit of spreading reports thoughtlessly, we shall see, that restraint in this respect, is no unnecessary part of christian discipline. An excessive love of talking is the general cause of an evil, which always brings disgrace on the offending party, and often misery on the innocent.

And, whilst we are watchful over our own conversation, we should also be cautious in

believing the reports, which circulate around us; lest we place our peace of mind, at the mercy of every unreflecting, or malicious gossip; lose all confidence in our friends; and the desire of reconciliation with our enemies. If we examine well the understanding, temper, and morals of our informants, we shall find the greater number influenced by vacuity of mind, by interest, envy, or revenge. But as this scrutiny is difficult, often indeed impracticable, let us withhold our belief from all injurious reports, when unsupported by the clearest evidence: so shall we act in unison with the spirit of christianity, and more probably avoid erroneous judgments, than by a credulous assent to the anecdotes of private scandal, current in our neighbourhood.

Our friends have a peculiar claim to candour from us, in cases of this nature. Is it just, on slender grounds, precipitately to condemn one, in whose virtues we have

trusted, perhaps, for years? Simple humanity,—then, how much more strongly friendship,—forbids us to add the weight of our assent, to the unkind aspersion. The smallest pecuniary demand would not be acceded to, without its being investigated; and shall we, unhesitatingly, yield up the treasure of a friend's reputation; resign the blessing of undoubting confidence, without affording him opportunity for justification, or defence? How much more lenient would our judgments be, how much more equitable, did we listen to reason, rather than to passion, or to prejudice!

ON ADVICE.

1.

THE chief point to be observed in giving advice, is, to give it seasonably.

It is vain, for instance, to offer advice to a man in a paroxysm of rage; or under such a pressure of business, as leaves him no time for consideration: and equally fruitless is it, to intrude an opinion on one, whose plans are already formed; and who cannot alter them, without incurring a greater loss, than the advantages proposed would counter-balance.

If we admonish a friend, in the presence of those, who delight to censure him, or

from whom he has already rejected the very suggestions which we offer; if we force our advice on persons, who feel towards us, envy, jealousy, or aversion; we engage at so manifest a disadvantage, as to have no reasonable prospect of doing good. Now advice should never be given, but with a view to this result. In the instances just mentioned, it is unseasonable, and must offend; and having rendered the feelings hostile to its cause, there is little probability that it will influence the conduct.

2.—*The advice, which appears most disinterested, will be the most readily followed.*

Disinterested advice is that, which we offer, without any view to the gratification of vanity, or to the advancement of our own fortune. We should not withhold it, when it is requested, or when we think it will be welcome and beneficial. Yet, even then, it

should be suggested, as advantageous; not enforced, as indispensable; it may invite consideration, but must not encroach on liberty.

Wisdom directs us, to weigh every counsel which may be offered; and to select carefully that which appears the best. Far, however, from seeking to benefit by unsolicited advice, men are generally indisposed to profit by that, which they have explicitly requested; and great delicacy is requisite, under all circumstances, in order to counteract this natural averseness from receiving advice.

Even when our opinion is expressly solicited, we should not be in haste to give it. Precipitancy, in such cases, shows a little mind, and limited views, which do not admit objects in their full extent, and under their various aspects. To give advice beneficially, we should be well acquainted, not only with the affair in question, but also

with the abilities and character of the person, who wishes to engage in it. Many people, when meditating an unjustifiable proceeding, will, without stating the matter fairly, apply to others for their direction, and thus endeavour to throw the odium of the transaction on their advisers.

Whilst we are laudably active, in advancing the virtue and happiness of all within our influence, we must bear in mind, that the motives, we have urged on our friends, for the regulation of their conduct, are become doubly compulsory on ourselves. We should be careful, likewise, that our superiority be not painfully felt, by those whom we wish to benefit. So much depends on the manner, in which advice is offered; and so invidious an office is it, to prove ourselves wiser than our associates, that it would be well, if things unknown were, when it is possible, presented as if merely forgotten.

Pope has so admirably expressed these sentiments, in his essay on criticism, that the following quotation from it may not be thought misplaced:..

“ 'Tis not enough your counsel still be true,
 “ Blunt truths, more mischief than nice falsehoods do:
 “ Men must be taught, as if you taught them not;
 “ And things unknown, proposed as things forgot:
 “ Without good breeding, truth is disapprov'd,
 “ That, only, makes superiour sense beloved.”

3.—*When we cannot entirely rely on our own judgment, we should ask advice of those, who are wiser than ourselves.*

Let us be impartial in the estimate we form of our abilities; and not think that we are equal, at all times, to guide our conduct aright, without borrowing light from our friends. However strong we may deem our understanding, (and our past errors might well lead us to abate a little on this point) reason and experience must convince us,

that our views are often miscoloured by our affections; and our judgment sometimes warped by our passions: consequently, that persons, not, at the time, under the influence of the same passions and affections, must be able to make a more impartial use of their faculties than ourselves.

If we sincerely seek perfection, does it signify whether we attain it, through the medium of others, or by our own unassisted efforts? But here the question recurs: do we sincerely seek perfection? Alas! we shall find much reason to doubt of this, if we consider the conduct, both of him who asks advice, and him who gives it. The first presents himself, with so respectful deference, that you would think him prepared to receive, without a question, the counsel for which he has applied. He states that, feeling inadequate to decide for himself, as to the line he should pursue, he solicits direction from superiour judgment.

Yet, could you penetrate the heart of that man, you would possibly perceive, that his principal view was, to gain approbation of his previous determinations; or to render his counsellor, in some degree, responsible for the event of his conduct. The second personage in the farce,—namely the counsellor,—repays this confidence, with professions of ardent and disinterested zeal; whilst, in reality, his suggestions are often guided by a latent reference to his own particular plans. At length, after much discussion, he finds, the best advice he can give his hesitating friend, is, to follow his secret inclinations. Such is the usual progress and termination of these affairs. Let *our* conduct, then, form an honourable exception to the statement. Let us ask advice, with sincerity of heart; receive it, with attention and gratitude; examine it, without prejudice against the source from whence it is derived, or prepossession in our own favour;

and if, after this process, we are convinced that it will direct us to what is best; let us hold it our duty, faithfully to follow up the conviction.

ON REPROOF.

I.

REPROVE the weak, with tenderness; the docile, with simplicity; the rebellious, with authority; and all, with caution and humanity.

Our sole aim in giving reproof should be, to recall a fellow creature to reason, and to virtue. We must not, therefore, allow ourselves the slightest expression of passion, or impatience: for we shall not win back a brother to the paths of religion, if we ourselves transgress her laws. Betraying dispositions, inconsistent with the benevolence professed, we strengthen his inclination to

rebel, and, in our turn, lay ourselves fairly open to his censure.

Indulgence towards weaknesses and prejudice, and that kindness of manner, which inspires confidence, will be most likely to dispose the offender to listen to reproof; or will, at least, leave us blameless, in the failure of our endeavours. Let us consider well, whether the duty of correction belong to us: whether some other person might not undertake it, with greater prospect of advantage to the delinquent: whether any thing in our conduct be likely to destroy the efficacy of our remonstrances; which, we may be certain, will remain unheeded by those, who see that we are subject to the same failings as themselves.

In pointing out the errors of a friend, that cautious delicacy should be observed, which we require in the correction of our own; and his reputation should be skreened, with equal tenderness. Public reproof, if often

repeated, destroys the feeling of shame, and does the mind an irreparable injury. To secure to our censure its full influence, we must bestow commendation cheerfully, when it is deserved; making it evident, that we blame with reluctance; and that our wish is the amendment, not the humiliation of the offender.

A little judicious praise, where it can be given without insincerity, forms an admirable preparative for reproof; softening the heart for its admission. It, from the first, engages our friend's acquiescence in our sentiments; and, by presenting the image of his virtues, gives his faults the strength of contrast. But every thing bordering on coarseness, satire, or ridicule, must be excluded, every thing, in short, that might tend to irritate or disgust.

Reprove your friends fearlessly, when they are in prosperity; but, when in adversity, touch the discordant string with a

gentle hand. They have then less need of a monitor; for affliction bears in itself a corrective power; and reprehension appears uselessly cruel, when directed against those, whom sorrow has subdued.

Neither should the time of meals, be made the season of reproof; for the constraint it introduces is ill-suited to the social board.

Never reprove a husband before his wife, nor a wife before her husband; a parent before his children, nor a master before his servants: the reason is too obvious to require illustration. Suffer slight faults to pass unnoticed; in order to give greater effect to your condemnation of what is seriously wrong. When a fault is actually committed, be as lenient in your sentence, as regard to the discouragement of similar offences will permit: but be vehement, and unrelenting in your strictures, while there is a chance of preventing a crime, still in contemplation.

A marked distinction should be made, between the faults, which arise from idleness, or ignorance, and those, which spring from malignity of disposition. Excessive severity often drives him who has erred, into the labyrinths of dissimulation and artifice; where he is inevitably, and irrecoverably lost. No punishment can be inflicted on a man of a feeling and generous heart, equal to that, of seeing the countenance he loves, overcast with sorrow for his transgressions.

2.—*Those who best deserve praise, are the most patient in suffering reproof.*

A meek submission to reproof will, most frequently, be found in those, whose excellencies give them the clearest title to commendation. Such persons gratefully receive correction, as conducive to the attainment of the elevated standard, at which they aim.

It is not sufficient, that we be conscious of our faults; we must also beware of regarding them with indulgence, and giving them softening appellations: for if we easily pardon, in ourselves, the commission of sin, we shall not readily pardon, in others, its reprehension. The consciousness that we are liable to fall, should prepare us to admit that we have actually fallen; and a candid acknowledgment of error, should instantly follow our perception of it. For, whoever has had the hardihood to commit a fault, must not plead want of strength to bear the correction it deserves.

Our friends generally soften our failings, in their representations of them to us; and guard our self-esteem with too great a tenderness: so that we may safely believe ourselves more faulty, than they pronounce us to be; and should encourage them to sincerity, by a cheerful deference to their remonstrances. Let us avoid those who flat-

ter, not those who reprehend us: the former hold out a false image of our mind; while the latter, offering a true representation of it, assist us to correct its imperfections.

By welcoming reproof, we render ourselves eventually worthy of praise: and by turning from the delusive glare of flattery, we are able to profit by the steady beacon-light of friendly admonition.

ON INSTRUCTION.

1.

LEARNING, alone, is not sufficient, to qualify a person to give instruction.

Talents of various kinds are required, in the art of conveying instruction. The preceptor should possess the secret, of rendering his pupil's mind, susceptible of impressions; he should be able to expand it, if it be narrow; to render it docile, if it be perverse; and clear, if it be confused: above all, he should be master of some spell, whereby to fix the ever-wandering attention. Without these powers, he will be unable to convey, to the young mind, new ideas; to

assist imperfect expressions; to satisfy doubts; and remove difficulties.

A large store of general knowledge must also have been laid up, to answer unexpected demands; for, when the *élève* requests instruction, it is too late for the mentor to begin to seek it.

That so few persons are really well informed, must be imputed, chiefly, to the indolence of those intrusted with education, who, content with securing to themselves pecuniary emolument, are indifferent whether, or not, they materially benefit those committed to their care.

2.—*We should engage the affections of young persons, before we require their obedience.*

When the heart is gained, it leads readily to the observance of every duty; and children contribute as much to their im-

provement, by attention, assiduity, and eagerness to please, as their masters, by the information they impart. Nothing is so well done, as that which is done willingly. The appearance of a beloved instructor is welcomed with joy: the pleasure of being with him, and receiving his encouraging smile, cheers the seriousness of study, and lightens its severest labours. He, who has the hearts of his little audience in his hands, may mould them as he pleases. Reason and affection appear blended in all he says; his authority is too gentle to be resisted; and obedience to his injunctions flows, rather from anxiety to gain his love, than from a servile dread of punishment.

But, you will ask, how is this influence to be acquired?

In the first place, by imparting instruction, not with fidelity only, but likewise with cheerfulness: that our children, observing our zeal in their service, may be ani-

mated to a correspondent ardour; and be convinced, it is their interest, more than our own, we have in view. An unaffected disregard of our own exertions, and earnestness for the welfare of those whom we instruct, is the most probable means of gaining their willing submission to the obligations and restrictions, we find it necessary to impose.

Secondly, we should study the genius, temper, and predominant inclinations of those we wish to guide. To the want of this indispensable knowledge, must be attributed, the frequent failure of our efforts. We know not what allurements to hold out; we are not able to proportion the tasks we assign, to the capacity of the learner; nor to furnish him with a clue, to facilitate their performance. Instead of winning his mind, we disgust and alienate it; and are, ourselves, disheartened by continual resistance; which we are obliged to combat, though unable to surmount.

If we advance rapidly, with children of slow understanding, we shall leave them far behind us; and if we proceed slowly, with those of quick parts, they will fill up the leisure our deliberation affords, with a hundred trifles, foreign to the subject of instruction. Haughtiness of manner will excite in the proud, a spirit of disobedience and rebellion; while the timid will be deprived by it, of all power of exertion; and the obstinate, more firmly fixed in their evil habits. From children of the latter disposition, nothing is to be obtained by open contradiction. A sprightly child will revolt from unvaried gravity of countenance; and one inclined to melancholy, will sink into despondence, unless cheered by the smile of encouragement.

Allow your children frequent intervals of entire liberty; when, if they do not suspect you of any design, they will appear without disguise, or restraint; and you will be able

to judge, by their conduct towards each other, and by the turn of their amusements, what their dispositions and abilities really are.

If we would engage young persons, strictly to fulfil the various duties of life, we must let them see, in our conduct, nothing which might raise a doubt of the necessity of performing them. Our own conviction of this necessity, evidenced by our practice, will outweigh volumes of exhortation. Our theory, to be efficacious, must be illustrated by our lives: if these disparage our precepts;—if, instead of being gentle and moderate, we clamour vehemently in defence of moderation and gentleness;—the most unanswerable arguments will be of no avail. The force of a contrary example, will overpower the most eloquent reasonings. “You expatiate on the happiness of virtue” (might our children reply). “and expect our implicit belief, while your actions prove your

own incredulity." But advice, seconded by example, almost compels assent. If, notwithstanding, the rebellious *will* continue to resist; if the tumult of the passions prevent the mild suggestions of reason from being heard; we must patiently wait till they have subsided into tranquillity, and the mind be restored to the free exercise of its faculties.

More permanent advantage will be produced by employing reason, and persuasion to combat what is wrong, than by adopting a system of punishments. Confinement and the rod, seldom render the appetite for learning more keen: and, where fear is the only restraint from evil, young persons plunge into vice, as soon as they are delivered from its temporary thralldom. But, if their obedience be enjoined on proper motives; if they be convinced, that the happiness of their existence, both here and hereafter, is dependant on the right formation of

their minds, for the enjoyment of felicity; there is reason to hope, that the instructions received in youth, will, in after life, be followed faithfully.

Do not assume, without extreme necessity, that severe and imperious tone, sometimes injudiciously affected by preceptors. Children are but too much inclined to reserve, before their superiours in age; and austerity of manners will shut still closer the opening heart, and entirely deprive you of their confidence; without which, no valuable fruit can be hoped, from the most laborious culture. Win them to love you, to speak to you with unreserve; let them not fear to disclose to you their faults; appear neither surprised, nor irritated at their wrong inclinations; but compassionate their weaknesses, and gently admonish them of their tendency to evil. This plan will, it is true, occasion you more present trouble, and require more constant attention, than an

arbitrary mode of government; but, then, far greater benefit will accrue from it, to the objects of your care.

When you intend to enter on the explanation of any subject, contrive to excite, previously, some curiosity concerning it; and avoid all technical and unintelligible phrases; which serve only to render knowledge unlovely; and to give an idea that it is unattainable. Where you wish to kindle a desire of excellence, beware how you extinguish the hope of success, or suffer wisdom to appear the bitter fruit of ill-requited labour.

We should place in a strong light, before our children, the happy consequences of the conduct we advise; that the hope of these advantages may support their courage; often liable to be depressed by the fatigues of application. If no definite end be presented to their view, faint, bewildered, and uncertain whither to direct their steps, they will

refuse to journey on, through rugged roads, they know not to what bourne.

Clear expressions, fixed principles, and orderly arrangement, must not be neglected by any, who study the advantage of their pupils. These will regain the wandering attention, aid the feeble judgment, and revive the drooping ardour of the learner. When he perceives, there is nothing beyond his comprehension, in the task assigned him, he sets about it cheerfully; the requisite application threatening no great fatigue of mind. Guided by fixed principles, he advances confidently in the appointed path, however faint the light his own intellects may supply. Orderly arrangement, in the last place, insensibly overcomes difficulties; and, by establishing habits of assiduity, renders the most arduous undertakings, feasible.

3.—*Invincible patience is a virtue, highly necessary to those, engaged in the duties of education.*

So various are the difficulties to be surmounted, so great the opposition to be overcome, so many the wrong inclinations to be rectified, in the course of education, that if they, who preside over it, are not armed with invincible patience, they will be surprised into sallies of anger, which, by depriving them of the command of their own reason, will unfit them for regulating the minds of their children.

That empire over the affections, that attractive example, those virtuous principles, recommended in the preceding paper, all, would be subverted by a single ebullition of rage. The remonstrances of a passionate man, are considered, as the effervescence of a vindictive spirit, rather than the emanations of a benevolent mind. One reason,

why children profit so little by reproof, is, that they perceive they are reprehended, rather because their faults are troublesome to their superintendants, than because they are prejudicial to themselves; and therefore, more through irritability, than from affection.

But patience, gives a man dominion over the mind of others, as well as over his own. The self-possession it secures, leaves him at liberty to make that employment of his powers, which circumstances may suggest, or necessity require.

4.—*While you instruct the understanding in the theory of virtue, be careful to train the conduct in correspondent habits.*

It is right, to store the memory with wise and pious maxims; and to fortify the mind with solid principles; to show young people what is their duty; and to convince them of their obligation to perform it; but it is still

better, to accustom them, whilst yet in your hands, to the *practice* of these instructions: a point, to which sufficient attention is seldom paid.

Montaigne playfully satirizes this neglect, where he says: "I should like to see, whether any famous dancer of our times, could teach his scholars to caper and twirl, by frisking about himself, without letting them move; as some pretend to form the human mind, whilst they leave it totally inactive! A man cannot learn to ride, to fence, or to play on an instrument, without practice; yet we meet with those, who pretend to teach youth, to judge soundly, and to speak well, though they exercise them in neither. They never condescend to ask what opinion a boy forms, on any point of grammar, rhetoric, or the classics; but impose their pages on his memory as oracles, of which the very letters, and syllables, constitute the essential part. Sounds are poured into

his ear, as into a trumpet; and all he has to do is, to echo what has been said."

This plan should be altered, and young people be led, according to their abilities, to feel, to judge, and to select; sometimes having the path cleared for them; sometimes being left entirely to their own exertions. The preceptor must not be the only person to think and speak; he should engage his pupil to talk, and listen in his turn.

If habits of action be not deeply rooted, maxims will be forgotten; duties neglected; principles will become ineffectual; and the mariner on life's ocean will wander from his course, though furnished with a faultless chart. Not only must the mind be enlightened, it must be accustomed to profit by the light which it possesses: for all studies, all speculations of real utility, terminate in the formation of virtuous conduct.

The memory is a magazine furnished with a variety of articles, valuable only when

again dispersed in advantageous commerce. To know by heart, is not *knowledge*:—it is merely to keep safely, what has been committed to our custody. Real knowledge, is that, which we can convert to use, without reference to a book, or to a master; and a sound judgment on one historian, is more beneficial to the mind, than an accurate recollection of a hundred. Inform your pupils what are the opinions, generally entertained, on the subjects of which you treat; and, at the same time, draw from them their own. Stimulate their intellectual powers, by frequent questions; for if, without encouraging them to make inquiries and remarks, you content yourself with declamation, your labour will be vain; the youthful audience will listen coldly; and feel nothing of that animation, awakened by the consciousness of having a part to act. Not only should you require their opinions, but also, their reasons for entertaining them; or they will

speak at random, and by rote. Their observations should be treated with respect; and their feeble essays at reasoning should meet with encouragement. Make them relate what they have read, and apply their deductions to the different subjects and circumstances, within their personal observation. If, for instance, the death of Cato, or of Cæsar, be the subject of their study; let them decide, whether the former acted rightly in escaping, by a suicide, the bonds of the victor; and whether Brutus and Cassius, by the assassination of the latter, did, in reality, deserve well of their country. In all these conversations, require of your little censors, exactness, order, and sincerity;—the exertion of their judgment, and fidelity to its dictates: let them prove that they have not vainly studied in the schools of eloquence and morality.

The greater number of men are contented to repeat, what their predecessors have

said; and follow prevailing notions, without venturing to form an opinion for themselves. They leave the labour of thinking and reasoning to others, and, exercising no faculty but memory, soon become paralyzed in their other mental powers. Their views having been confined to the beaten track, every novelty appears alarming, and rouses them to indignation, or moves them to contempt.

Accurate definitions of the moral sentiments, disquisitions on the merit of celebrated maxims, the advantages they promise, and the mode of adapting them to the characters of mankind, consume so great a portion of the thoughts of a certain class of men, that they neglect to illustrate their systems, in their lives: and thus, virtue, which meets an eulogy from every mouth, secures a sanctuary in the bosom of, but few.

5.—*The most efficacious instructions are those, which are founded on the solid principles of religion.*

Instructions, founded on religious principles, are as far superiour to all others, as the divine source, whence they are derived, exceeds every human motive. Religion is the fountain of truth, and justice, and mercy: the intentions, which it inspires, are simple, upright, and benevolent: the conduct, which it regulates, is equitable, kind, and consistent. It guides us towards perfection, by teaching us what we owe to God, to man, and to ourselves; and by offering us a sure support in the performance of the duties it enjoins. By giving a preponderating influence to the commands of our heavenly father, it prevents our being deterred from the practice of virtue, by worldly considerations: and rendering us faithful observers of the divine laws, it

finally prepares us for the exalted enjoyments of a future state.

Let us contemplate those happy individuals, who, having given to religion the first place in their hearts, make it the constant guide of all their actions; and we shall need no further comment on the assertion; that there is no instruction like that, which is founded on its solid principles.

ON SECRECY.

1.

WHATEVER has been confided to our secrecy, is a sacred deposit, of which we have no right to dispose.

The interests of the community at large are promoted, by frequent representations of the imperative obligation to secrecy, wherever confidence has been reposed. Should we cease to consider fidelity and discretion as sacred duties, society would degenerate into a scene of universal treachery and disorder. No needful counsel could be asked, no friendly sympathy, or assistance sought, for the regulation of our affairs, or

the solace and amendment of our hearts. The dread of exposure would seal up every bosom. Neither prudence, nor talents could secure their possessors, from the evils consequent on a breach of trust. Men would view each other as hollow friends, or disguised enemies; the glance of suspicion would succeed, to the open look of confidence; and the sweets of unreserved intercourse be exchanged, for the bitterness of distrust and resentment.

These lamentable consequences are often visible in families, where secrets have been betrayed; and manifest themselves, in open contempt of the loquacious weakness, which was incapable of reserve; or, by strongly marked aversion towards the traitor, who has laid open the frailty, which trusted to him for shelter and concealment.

The abhorrence we naturally feel of treachery in others, should render our own fidelity, under every change of circum-

stances, inviolate. The once confiding friend may become an inveterate enemy; still, the engagements we have made with him, remain as binding, as in our days of union. A failure in friendship, on his side, cannot license an act of perfidy, on ours.

Our own thoughts, desires, and intentions, we may, equally with our own possessions, impart to those we love: but the secrets, of which we are the depositaries, must be withheld from even the dearest friend. The laws of friendship can never require an act of treachery: on the contrary; the security of a connexion so unreserved, can only be maintained by a strict adherence to the dictates of honour.

However unimportant be the communication made to us, it is sufficient, that it be given under the seal of secrecy, for it to command our silence. The habit of being faithful in little things, renders fidelity, in affairs of consequence, more easy, and more

assured. It accustoms us, so to regulate our countenance and manner, that no unguarded movement may betray, what we wish concealed; and that the very person, most interested in our discretion, being in no way reminded of the confidence he has reposed, may be led, almost to doubt our knowledge of his secret, and to question the reality of his having intrusted it to us.

The curious must not be allowed to suspect that we have a secret: for, like hidden treasure, when people know *where* it is concealed, it is more than half discovered.

But, however perfect be our discretion, the thing most desirable is, to have no secret to conceal. Did I see a man inclined to press on me the knowledge of his private affairs, I would entreat him, as he valued his own repose and mine, to forbear. His apprehension of treachery on my part, and my dread of accusations on his side, would thus be precluded. For as a similar confi-

dence would probably be extended to some other person, that second confidant might be faithless, and I,—suspected.

2.—*We put ourselves wholly in the power of him, to whom we intrust an important secret.*

Secrets should be confided only in cases of necessity; and then, with the utmost precaution. Indeed we cannot be too circumspect in revealing, to any one, an affair, the publication of which would materially affect ourselves, or our friends. Let us balance the evils that would ensue from its publicity, against the advantages of the partial disclosure we wish to make; and not thoughtlessly subject ourselves to irremediable injury, and unavailing regret. “To whom,” said an ancient sage, “shall I confide my secret? To a fool?—no:—for he would immediately divulge it. To a wise

man?—but the wisest are not always wise. If I tell it to M * * * *, because he is my friend, he also may intrust it to N * * * *, because N * * * * is his friend: for the same reason, the latter will confide it to O * * * *, and thus the matter will become public, while each person thinks himself clear of any breach of faith; having spoken only in the allowable confidence of friendship.” The most reserved have, alas ! one, or two friends, so very intimate, that they can conceal nothing from them. These intimates have, on their side, a few particular friends, whom they trust in the same unlimited degree: the number of friends necessarily multiplying at each remove.

As the first leaf, which receives the rain-drop, forms its channel to a second, and that conveys it to a third, and to a fourth; until it sinks, and is absorbed in the bosom of the earth: so, a secret passes from ear to ear, and from mouth to mouth, till it

mingles with the public news of the day, and loses its very name and nature.

Since I was not able to keep my own secret, what right have I to be angry, that my friend has not been able to keep it either? If it ought to be concealed, why did I disclose it? By placing it out of my own power, I evince a confidence in another, which I do not myself deserve; and, if his fidelity surpass not my own, I have no right to complain. His interest is not so deeply involved; and can I expect from him, a superiour degree of discretion; or require, that he shall be more faithful to me, than I have been to myself? Now, I may be certain that my secret will never be betrayed, if I do not divulge it, in the first instance.

He who imparts his secrets, on a slight acquaintance, does not thereby merit a return of confidence; nor usually obtain it. For if he be indiscreet, in respect to his own affairs, he will be still less guarded in respect to the affairs of his associates.

ON FEMALE CONVERSATION.

1.

FEMALE conversation would not be lightly esteemed, were it rescued from the trifles, by which it is too commonly engrossed.

It cannot be denied, that a great number of men glory in professing a contempt for women, *in general*; while they behave towards them, *individually*, with more deference than towards their own sex. Whether this contempt be the effect of reason, and this deference, that of passion, is a subject which I do not here intend to agitate. I will only observe that, for their own credit, men ought, either to speak of women with

more respect, or to love them less passionately. They pretend that women are contemptible from their weaknesses: how then will they justify the dominion which these despised beings maintain over them? A dominion so powerful, and so evident, that they do not attempt to disavow it; and readily own their subjection to its fascinations. This ascendancy appears under so many forms, that most of the important, as well as the minor transactions of our lives, will be found to have been influenced by women. They have turned aside the aim of the politician; divested the philosopher of his gravity; triumphed over the previously invincible warrior; and shaken the principles of the most severe moralist.

Women have melted, by a look, the proudest hearts, and, by a slight mark of tenderness, have subdued the firmest virtue.

There is nothing to which a man may not be led, nothing which he will not undertake.

to please the woman, who has gained his heart. She can tame the ferocious, and soften the cruel; can humanize the misanthrope, and polish the clown; can disarm the furious, sadden the gayest heart, and enliven the most sorrowful. From what mouth have women not extorted praise? From what bosom have they not forced sighs? Where is the lofty spirit, that they have not humbled? The moment they have fascinated, their defects disappear: men fix their eyes only on the merits they possess; whilst imagination endows them with all, in which they are deficient.

If, after this powerful and unresisted influence, men still pretend to despise their fair enslavers; it is obvious that they must proportionably lower their own estimation. Whilst women possess a power so absolute, they will smile at the satires and invectives of the other sex. Men may rail at them in their absence, but, in their presence, they

gladly resume their chains: bravoës in words, in actions they are very slaves; atoning by submission, and respectful assiduity, for the hardihood of their previous boastings.

Whatever men may say, it is less impossible to find in a woman, the deep and sound reason of a man; than to meet in a man, with the charms and tenderness natural to a woman. And this difference, in which lies the power of woman, and the weakness of man, will secure to the former an attachment much more valuable, than the sentiments withheld.

But to resume the hint, with which we commenced. As laws and customs do not permit women to share in the administration of those affairs, denominated by the world, important; an education is given them, suited to their allowed employments: functions of no great moment, when compared with those, from which they are debarred.

This treatment, confining their attention to trifles, makes their conversation, as frivolous as their pursuits. Men who have received a similar education, suffer from it similar injury; and too often draw on themselves the contemptuous pity of those, whose studies have been of a more manly and elevated nature. The irrationality of women proceeds, wholly, from their being unexercised in rational avocations. This justice must not be denied them; since the distinguished character of some individuals, who have had superiour advantages, affords a presumption, that all have abilities, from which honour might accrue to them, were the female mind withdrawn from the trifles, which at present form the objects of its application. Their apparent deficiency of intellect, should meet with indulgence, mingled with regret, that they are not what they would have been, had education trained them to a higher class of employments.

That women are generally averse from mental exertion, must be attributed to the conduct of men; who not only exempt them from it, but cast a degree of ridicule on those, who are differently inclined; and, also, to the incompatibility of such exertion, with the idle and luxurious life, to which they are accustomed. The acuteness of perception, and delicacy of sentiment natural to them, with their engaging and persuasive eloquence, render them equally capable with men, of some of the most elevated pursuits. They ought, at least, to make the trial; with this precaution;—that they cultivate their minds, without pretending to be learned; and do not assume those pedantic airs, which disparage the most brilliant parts, but which are usually confined to persons of little knowledge, and excessive vanity.

2.—*Women keep no secret so well, as that of their age.*

The warmest advocates for the fair sex, have admitted, that they do like to talk. Having often little of moment to employ them, the activity of their mind finds vent in words: and it has been insinuated, that this propensity makes them not very eligible depositaries of secrets in general.

But, without deeply investigating a point so invidious, every one must allow, that there is *one* secret, which they keep with a fidelity, that increases with increasing years. I allude, to the secret of—*their age*. Far from thoughtlessly betraying this, they employ every device, which may prevent its being discovered: they lay on red and white; assume the most juvenile airs, and juvenile dress; seek the aid of contrast, by associating with the plain and the elderly; whilst they cautiously avoid such situations,

as might bring them into comparison, with the blooming and the youthful.

A mother, engrossed by selfish vanity, and jealousy shunning the reproach of advancing years, (to which, after every precaution, her faded looks must render her liable,) a mother!—unworthy of the name!—will separate from her daughter, whose womanly appearance destroys the deceptive opinion she is labouring to establish!

She will condemn the poor girl to seclusion, that the reign of her own apparent youth may be prolonged! And all this, because it is voted, that none but young women can be engaging; and men, without reflecting, acquiesce in the inference, that none but young women can be beloved. Influenced by this prejudice, they do not consider that, while youth passes away, bad dispositions remain, increase, and at last convert love into indifference, if not into aversion: fatal fruits! gathered univer-

sally from those hasty attachments, which owe their rise to exterior charms alone!

But general opinion prevails, and perhaps ever will prevail over reasoning, on subjects of this nature: and women make it a pretext, for concealing the number of their years, when they exceed the term fixed on as a limit to the reign of female influence. If this dissimulation be condemned, why do not men afford them reason to believe, that more solid qualities might secure their affections? They could not then plead, that they are compelled to use artifice in order to please.

Let no one however flatter herself, that it is easy to deceive in this matter: for men think it their interest to discover the truth; and women, prompted by jealousy, betray each other. No precautions can baffle the researches of a rival; and even persons, who have not private views to gratify, are engaged by curiosity in the inquiry. The

more pains a woman takes to disguise her age, the more are they stimulated to discover it; and considerable additions are always made, in order to justify the derision, her ample substractions have occasioned.

Absence of affectation is here the only wisdom; and she who is guided by it, will successively discard the tastes and passions, that are unsuitable to the period of life, at which she arrives.

3.—*Immodest conversation justly exposes a woman to the imputation of shameless conduct.*

The woman, who, in her conversation, lays aside the restraints of modesty, will indubitably be suspected of similar libertinism in her conduct. She subjects herself to insults, to which genuine delicacy will never be exposed; for the most unprincipled man

cannot divest himself of respectful feelings, towards a woman of real purity.

The allurements of the abandoned never create true attachment, and soon lose the power which novelty may give; for, in love, there is no constancy, where there is no esteem. The object must be deemed spotless; and this is the privilege of virtue: even where virtue is wanting, apparent modesty will obtain the respect due to her; and this is the privilege of modesty. It is the surest guard of female honour; and she, who is destitute of it, presents herself a willing prey to infamy.

As a man is not sufficiently brave, if he have only the courage of a woman; so a woman is not sufficiently pure, if she have only the chastity of a man. Here the slightest blemish is a crime. Reserve and modesty are the strongest attractions, a woman can possess; and the qualities most likely to secure a constant attachment in the other

sex. This opinion is universal. Montaigne thus gives his testimony to it. "Modesty would insure to women, not only esteem, but love. The refusals of timidity enhance the value of consent. We may swear, and threaten, and complain, but in our hearts we love them the better for their reserve: of all allurements, it is the most powerful."

Since the happiness of women consists, in their being the objects of constant and tender affection; let genuine modesty pervade their every thought, look, word and movement. So will the attachments they inspire, free from all debasing mixture, form the glory of their youth, the solace of their declining years, and haply revive in that higher sphere, where the pure in heart shall be admitted to see God.

ON LOVE.

1.

I*F a woman listen to professions of love, she will soon begin to feel a return of affection.*

As it is the nature of women to desire to be beloved, they listen favourably to assurances of attachment: the idea, frequently admitted, soon produces a belief, in unison with their wishes; and, when fully persuaded that they are the objects of deep and generous feeling, it is not easy for them to preserve their indifference.

She, who suffers the assiduities of a lover, and permits him to speak of his sentiments,

gives him reason, whatever she may say to the contrary, to hope every thing from perseverance. The pleasure a woman feels in being the object of tenderness, makes the man, who convinces her that she is such, appear pleasing in her eyes. Gratitude, she thinks, demands some return: but setting aside gratitude, a natural sympathy, and expectation of reciprocal support and comfort, strongly dispose men and women to mutual attachment; some small additional excitement brightens the embers to a flame, and determines its direction. Vainly do women rely on the strength of previous resolutions, to enable them to resist a passion so insidious, and to which nature inclines them to surrender. She, who sincerely wishes to defend her heart from its inroads, must steadily refuse to see, or hear, the man who manifests an attachment to her; especially if he possess any graces of person, or of mind. Silent, tender, and repeated atten-

tions, have power to efface from the memory, all that sages have written and declaimed against love, and its delusions. Reason is an insufficient guard; its voice is silenced when the heart begins to plead: against love, there is no security, but in flight.

2.—*However disinterested love may profess to be, it has generally some latent reference to self-gratification.*

Believe not credulously, in professions of perfectly disinterested love: a long and severe trial is necessary to establish their sincerity. Do you wish to make this trial? Destroy all expectation of a return of tenderness;—but, tremble whilst you do so; for you will most probably discover, that the hopes, which nourished passion, were essential to its existence. Self-love mingles, more or less, in all our attachments, and it

is one cause of their inconstancy: they decline with the decline of pleasure, in which novelty is well known to be a principal ingredient.

Men usually evince, at first, a rational, respectful, and generous attachment, in order to justify the return of affection they wish to excite. Oh! that women, conscious of their own worth, would never suffer it to degenerate!—but would prove that, captivated by superiour sense and virtue, no other chains could bind them!

3.—*The anger of a lover is ever willing to be appeased.*

A man in love will complain of his wrongs, and bring a thousand charges against his mistress, whilst, in his heart, he wishes her to be exculpated, and longs to have his own injustice clearly proved. A beloved offender may easily establish her innocence;

she has an advocate, that can set aside the strongest evidence: the heart of her lover pleads *her* cause, more warmly than his own; and at the moment that he invokes vengeance, and protests that he will break through every tie, he sighs for a reconciliation, and would feel the fulfilment of his petitions, as the most severe affliction.

Theona, forsaken by Phæton, after having uttered numberless imprecations against him, thus concludes:

“Just Heaven! Avenging Gods, whom I attest!
O, hear me not!”

Resentment cannot restore indifference to the wounded bosom: the bands of love form no gordian knot; they are not to be *cut asunder*, but must be *gradually unfastened*. The agitations of alternate anger and apprehension will, on the contrary, strengthen passion, if the fair offender know how to avail herself of their aid. The very desire to pacify an irritated lover is, in itself, a justification.

Flight is the only course for those, who are resolved to conquer love. The senses, freed from the immediate influence of the object beloved, gradually resign the impressions they had received, and which would have been rendered more profound and permanent by its continued presence. Other interests intervene, and as the mind no longer dwells exclusively on one object, it loses insensibly its empire over the heart.

4.—*Being conscious that we are not at all times equally amiable, can we expect to be always equally beloved?*

The charm of novelty, respectful attention, and graceful manners, but above all, a careful concealment of our defects from a desire to please, captivate the fancy, and awaken hope. But when this point is gained,—when the heart is won,—our endeavours to appear amiable are gradually relaxed;

restraint becomes irksome; it is thrown aside; and we stand disclosed in our natural dispositions. The clearness of perception, which passion had destroyed, is restored by that indifference, which familiarity generally produces: the discovery of mutual failings affords a pretext for mutual disrespect; and “the gentle offices of watchful love” are totally neglected. Meanwhile, the endearing attentions, omitted by ourselves, are employed by some new acquaintance, who fills the place that we have left vacant. Complaint is unreasonable, where inconstancy proceeds from reciprocal indifference. In some hearts, love fades at an early period; in others, it droops not till a later season; but durability is not the character of any human passion. Visionary is the expectation of unvaried tenderness, from a being so inconsistent as man; however fervent, and however sincere, may be his protestations.

Love resembles the inconstant planet of the night, which appears to wane as it approaches the luminary, from which it derives its brightness. Yet, when the heart is subdued, the object beloved is ever deemed a singular exception.

Must then every attachment be regarded in this melancholy light? Far otherwise! That union of hearts, which proceeds from mutual admiration of virtue, cherished by similar views, and congenial tastes, and purified by divine influence, will be more closely cemented by every succeeding year: whilst the ever brightening prospect of eternity, in which love is perfected, will confer on the affections of the heart a durability, that no personal, or mental charms could ensure.

ON COMPLAINT.

I.

WE grow weary of pitying a person, who is always complaining.

It is true, that complaint usually mitigates the sense of the evil it deplores: for, as nothing heightens joy, more than the pleasure of calling in others to witness it; so nothing alleviates suffering, so much as the giving an unrestrained vent to our sorrow. The generous pity of a feeling heart lightens the bosom of half its load: yet we should observe moderation in our complaints, and sometimes check the plaintive tone, though we feel disposed to indulge it; lest we weary

and disgust our friends, by perpetual lamentations.

Self-love causes us to feel our own troubles very acutely; but we must not expect an equal sensibility to them, in others; since, in them, the same cause operates to repress any painful degree of sympathy. We may allowably pour out our heart in the bosom of a friend, and indulge in a moderated recital of our griefs; but we must not overwhelm him with our despair, nor pursue him with incessant wailings: demands on our compassion, perpetually repeated, deaden the feelings; and make us consider the complainer, rather as discontented and irritable, than as afflicted. Whoever frequently complains, without a cause, will at length find his real distress, unpitied, and unheeded.

There is no tendency of the mind, that should be counteracted with greater vigilance, than the selfish propensity to cloud

the happiness of our nearest connexions, by a detail of our own misery. We are often inclined to exaggerate our misfortunes, and to paint them in the darkest colours, that they may draw tears from those who love us: and the same firmness, which we admired when it bore its own afflictions without a murmur, appears to us hateful, if it remains unsubdued by the sufferings that we endure.

An invalid should state his case simply, allowing himself neither to prognosticate future maladies, nor to enlarge on the present: and a cheerful composure of countenance should be preserved, as much as possible, even under severe indisposition. By talking of our disorders, and engaging others to discuss them with us, we fix our imagination on displeasing objects, from which it would be wiser to divert it.

Though we should be ready, from benevolent motives, to listen kindly to the complainings of the unhappy; yet, in our own

case, a conviction of the small importance of our private feelings, should prevent our obtruding them on the attention of our general acquaintance.

2.—*The language of complaint proceeds less from extreme suffering, than from a fastidious temper of mind.*

No persons are so far from happiness, as those, whose susceptibility exposes them to feel, even trifles, acutely; and whose tastes are wrought to so extreme a refinement, as to receive only pain, where the rest of the world receive pleasure.

It is a proof of weakness, to be so far enslaved to a particular way of life, or style of society, as to be uninterested and uncomfortable in every other. A pebble, or a grain of sand, will wound the foot, that has trod only on the smoothest carpets, and rested only on the softest cushions; and the

lightest breeze will chill the frame, which has known no transitions, but from the luxurious apartment, to the still more luxurious carriage. Nothing is so adverse to enjoyment, as a course of enervating indulgence: it renders the slightest hardship, insupportable; and as trifling inconveniences are of perpetual occurrence, the cheerfulness of over delicate persons is continually interrupted; and they are strangers to the tranquillity experienced by those, who are less vulnerable by the minor evils of life.

ON CONSOLATION.

1.

WE shall afford little comfort to the distressed, if our study is, rather how to express ourselves with elegance, than how, the most effectually, to suggest motives of consolation.

Even the house of mourning is not always free from the intrusions of vanity; since those who visit it are sometimes more intent on displaying their own eloquence, than on soothing the sorrows of the afflicted.

It is not the choice of our words, that conveys comfort to the mourner; nor yet altogether the strength of our reasonings; it is more the *kindness* in our *manner* of offering

consolation, that cheers his drooping heart. If we show him, at first, that we sympathise in his feelings, he will listen to us afterwards, whilst we indirectly oppose the indulgence of excessive grief; and lead him, by insensible degrees, to firmer resolves, and a more christian resignation.

A hasty opposition to the passion of grief, does but irritate the wounded mind, or sink it more deeply in sadness. The feelings are exasperated by contradiction: we see, even in ordinary conversation, that an opinion, carelessly dropped, is defended with warmth, the very moment it happens to be attacked.

We should not, on the other hand, dwell too long upon the afflictive subject; but gently draw the mind from the contemplation of its sorrows, by directing it to other objects; first, of a similar cast; and then, gradually, to such as are of a somewhat different nature; till at length, we steal away, imperceptibly, the torturing recollection.

Unhappily, custom has established an opposite line of conduct; and exacts a painful display of condolence; “the veil of woe;” and all that can excite gloomy images in the dejected mind.

2.—*A complete mastery over our own feelings is necessary, to qualify us for affording consolation to others.*

To obtain this equanimity, we must prepare our minds for every afflictive event; we must acquaint ourselves with the strength of our probable trials, and with our powers of endurance; we must fortify our hearts by the conviction, that impatience encreases our sensibility to the strokes of misfortune, and defeats the beneficial purposes for which they are inflicted; while filial resignation to a father’s hand, averts future chastisements, by making them less requisite. Meditations of this nature will enable us to offer our

friends that support, of which every human being must, at some period of his existence, stand in need.

The following reflections may be useful, either in themselves, or by exciting some person to suggest such as are more salutary. It matters not by what hand the cup of peace be presented, provided the soul drink of it, and be satisfied.

Consolatory reflections under adversity and vicissitudes of fortune.

There is not a misfortune, to which I am not liable: my heart should therefore be prepared for every trial, and should acknowledge with gratitude that divine compassion, through which it is exempted from so many.

Has death deprived me of a friend? I am indeed afflicted, yet not driven to despair; for I had accustomed myself to the reflection, that he and I were, both, but travellers to a better country.

The poisoned shafts of calumny are pointed at me: yet I do not start; for I had long observed that innocence possessed no talisman, to conceal her from the keen eye of malignity.

I am deprived of a situation from which pleasure and honour accrued to me: but this I had not regarded as inalienably mine; only as a loan, which I was cheerfully to restore, when the hand that bestowed should again demand it.

I had great possessions; I was under obligations to no man, whilst many were indebted to me: now, all has vanished; yet my mind remains unshaken; for observation had taught me, before-hand, that a sudden turn in my affairs, a robbery, a failure in punctuality, an accident, which no human foresight could avert, might reduce me to poverty, and throw me into a state of dependance upon the bounty of strangers.

I was once caressed by affectionate companions, who appeared interested in all my concerns, and omitted no mark of tender attachment. These companions have disappeared; a reverse of fortune has driven them from me : but the desertion only strengthens the persuasion, I had previously obtained, that adversity possesses repulsive powers, of greater force than the attractions of prosperity.

The patron on whom my advancement depended, and who, whilst his influence was felt even in foreign cabinets, provided for my interests with a father's kindness, now lies himself crushed beneath the wheel of fortune, and needs the aid, which he formerly bestowed. But this revolution cannot destroy my confidence ; it had long since been taught, not to rest alone on human protection, which, fluctuating as the shade of the quivering aspen, I knew could never yield a steady shelter to the fevered traveller.

A flattering reputation had been accorded me; my praises echoed through every circle: but undeserved contempt has succeeded to admiration. This transition I had anticipated; for as interest, or complaisance are the ordinary sources of excessive praise; a slight inadvertency, the failure of a promising enterprize, or merely the caprice natural to the human mind, may degrade the idol of the public to a depth proportioned to his preceding elevation.

In this manner providing a store of patience, previous to the actual arrival of evil; familiarizing myself, in idea, to the stern aspect of misfortune, before it frowns in reality upon me; and making a constant reference to unerring wisdom, and unfailing goodness; I am able to maintain that self-possession, which men in general but begin to seek, when the hour of trial is arrived. It is scarcely possible to restrain the violent emotions excited by unexpected calamity:

we should therefore mistrust the caresses of "the fickle goddess," and hold ourselves prepared for her infidelities, even when she smiles most kindly upon us. Whoever follows, without deviation, the path of duty, will have many a rude combat to sustain: but let him not faint in spirit;—the prize of victory is secured to him.

In our intercourse with mankind, we may observe, that there is not any one person, who enjoys every kind of good, and continues in the enjoyment of it to the end of his life. One man has great possessions; but is of low extraction. Another boasts a noble birth; but is destitute of the means of supporting it. A third, both wealthy and high-born, pines in solitude; a stranger to the charms of love and friendship. A fourth, blessed with an amiable consort, and extensive domains, sighs to think his lands must devolve to strangers: while his indigent neighbour counts a blooming train, for whom

he knows not in what manner to provide. In short, providence leaves, in every situation, something to desire, and something to apprehend; that, in adversity, supported by hope; and checked by fear in prosperity; men might learn to look beyond themselves, and might cherish the principles of fortitude and humility.

Prosperity, if it produce a blind security, exposing us defenceless to the strokes of fate, is, surely, a good, counterpoised by a heavy weight of evil: and if it give birth to a solicitude, proportionate to the value we place on our blessings, it has an alloy, which might well blunt the edge of envy.

If riches “make themselves wings, and fly away,” they but anticipate our desertion of them: were they to remain long stationary, we must, on our part, journey onwards, and leave them behind.

We know not our own strength, until we have been obliged to wrestle obstinately with

fortune. The felicity which has suffered no interruption, is of a sickly and susceptible temperament: but when a man has been called upon to defend himself from aggression, to surmount obstacles, to endure privations, to provide against contingencies, his mind assumes a firmer tone; it yields not to the invader, or if it, for a moment, sink, still it presents a barrier to his progress. No native of the forest is so firmly rooted, as the oak, which has been buffeted by the blasts of a hundred winters. Thus the veteran in life's warfare raises his head tranquilly, amidst the calamities that surround and threaten him; and which serve but as exercises of his fortitude and vigour.

The warnings of adversity are salutary: they recall us from our wanderings, and compel us to return to God. They open for his truths an entrance into our heart; and prepare the only sacrifice worthy to be offered to divine justice, by prostrating our souls

and bodies at the foot of his throne. Virtue, like incense, often exhales its sweetest perfume when bruised. There are men whose supine spirit needs the constant goad of adversity: whose humility would swell into pride, were they not perpetually humbled; whose morality would not resist the call of temptation; were they not hedged in with thorns; whose hearts would become hard, were they not melted by the feeling of their own miseries; whose devotion would be extinguished, were it not kindled by the brands of persecution.

A man in the middle station of life, has many above him, but still more below. If, guided by popular opinion, he esteem his superiours happier than himself, ought he not, in consistency, to consider himself more favoured, than the mechanics, who toil to provide for his necessities? Yet even these, "the sons of labour," have many an interval of enjoyment. This reflection, though

equally obvious and useful, is seldom made. Most men fix their eyes on those who precede themselves; few turn them on those, who follow in the march of life. An individual, in the former rank, fills a larger space in their imagination, than hundreds of the latter class.—Yet, where is he, that can truly say: “I have no superiour.”

A virtuous man, struggling with adversity, and undismayed by the outrages of fortune, is a spectacle pleasing to the eye of heaven. Alone unmoved by the magnitude of his sufferings, his soul, invincibly calm, changes not with the changing scene: humble in prosperity, in adversity, he is not cast down.

How truly sublime is the character, which engrafts on the weakness of humanity, a resemblance to the security of the divine nature! But such examples can be found, only in the tragic scenes of life. The civil hero is not more depressed, when selected to try his powers against adverse fortune, than

the soldier, when he hears the trumpet, that summons him to battle. Should he sink, his fame will still survive; and his memory be regarded with veneration like that inspired by fallen temples, whose ruins command the reverence of successive ages.

The soul of man can be fully known, only in adversity: her iron hand forces open the secret recesses of the heart, and bares the bosom to the eye of day. The skill of the pilot is manifested in the storm;—the warrior's prowess, in the hour of combat;—so is the strength of the soul revealed, by the ordeal of affliction; and the temper of the mind disclosed, in the day of adversity.

It is not sufficient that we endure evils with patience; we must do more;—we must convert them into blessings. The solitude, which poverty brings with it, may “leave us leisure to be good.” And a bitter disappointment, or painful illness, by lessening the love of life, may serve to lessen the na-

tural dread of dissolution ; and may urge us to a diligent preparation for the state, that will succeed. When we meekly bow beneath the afflictive dispensations of providence, they occasion us less suffering, than when we madly fret and chafe against them. The divine decrees are irreversible: to resist them, is to sharpen the edge of anguish, and to encrease the necessity for chastisement ; whilst submission will be found a ready emollient for the deepest wounds of the spirit, and the sure preparative for peace and joy.

'The knowledge, that many of our fellow creatures are suffering under misery similar, or superiour to our own, could, we might suppose, afford no comfort : yet is it a consideration often suggested by those who wish to alleviate grief. Selfish indeed must be the heart, which such an idea could sooth.

We should not wish for trials :—the desire would be presumptuous :—we should wish only for the temper of mind, that would

enable us to support them with cheerfulness. Nevertheless, prosperity cannot be accounted a real good, whilst it is so frequently seen to be the portion of the worthless, without leading to their reformation. On the contrary, virtue too often slumbers during a calm; the vigour of the mind is relaxed; satisfied with being happy, we labour not to increase in wisdom; and, full of the temporal blessings we possess, are apt to forget the eternal inheritance to which we should aspire. But fortune delights in change, nothing relating to her is certain,—excepting, the capriciousness of her nature. Her gifts do not remain long in the same hands, but are incessantly transferred from one votary to another. When, therefore, she takes up her abode under your roof;—bid her welcome: when she makes ready to depart;—speed her on her way; and, relying on the care of heaven, remain content with honest poverty. A hand above our con-

If we cannot entirely dispel the clouds that, at some seasons, envelope our minds, we should not allow them to be apparent in the social circle; whence they would banish that sportive thoughtlessness, which constitutes its greatest charm; and introduce, in its stead, restraint and gloom. We should appear pleased with our companions, and ourselves; and, as far as possible, be what we appear: keeping our minds open to enjoyment, from even trivial sources; but closely guarded against the countless host of Liliputian troubles.

The performance of serious duties should be tempered, as far as propriety admits, by cheerfulness of manner, and serenity of countenance. Yet, pleasing as gaiety undoubtedly is, its indulgence must be regulated by regard to circumstances: delicacy must season it, and good sense give it weight. By blending mirth with gravity, the latter is prevented from sinking into gloom; the former, from effervescing into folly.

One caution is very necessary to the happy; since joy is often loquacious; it is this:—not to enlarge on the particulars of their good fortune, or dwell on their pleasurable sensations, in the presence of the unfortunate; for the comparison these would involuntarily draw, between their own situation, and that of the more favoured relater, would give additional bitterness to affliction.

Consolatory reflections under contemptuous treatment, or calumny.

Shall we give every impertinent, or malicious person the power to disturb our peace? The sole answer vouchsafed to slander should be,—a conduct which refutes it. The obloquy pointed at us, must then recoil upon our calumniators, who would appear in ten-fold darkness, from the lustre of our innocence.

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Nothing is more astonishing, than the pains men take to procure a distinction so transitory as popular esteem; one which urges on its own decay, by the envy it invariably excites; and which, if accorded to one part of the conduct, is ever balanced by censure on some other point: for human approbation is of too little value, to be made the settled recompense of virtuous actions. General admiration, when most sincere, confers on its object no real excellence: it adds nothing to the merit which it extols; and subsists no longer than we can fix the world's attention upon ourselves;—a period of but short duration!

However flattering to human vanity may be the admiration of our contemporaries, their affection is far more worthy our pursuit. The first may give us an ascendancy over their minds; the last will gain us admission into their hearts. It is possible to be the object of the most malignant jealousy, where

we are, at the same time, highly admired and esteemed ; but, where we are truly beloved, we are secure from the annoyance of every evil passion.- After all, if we covet glory, the shortest and safest path to it is, to do for the sake of *conscience*, what men do, in general, for the sake of *reputation*.

Now, let us examine a little the nature of this *glory*, which is sought with so much eagerness, and resigned with so much reluctance. It entirely consists in the advantageous opinion of many persons collectively, whose individual suffrage we should disregard ; of persons, who commonly know but little of our character, and who bear us still less affection. These suffrages we have allowed to be wholly useless ; adding neither vigour to the mind, nor beauty to the person ; leaving our sufferings undiminished ; and serving but to mislead, by inducing us to form a judgment of ourselves, not according to our conscience, but according to the

opinion of the public. Having beguiled us during life, it forsakes us at the hour of death! and can such an object be worthy our ambition?

Weak and necessitous as we are, full of imperfection, and constantly in want of substantial aid, shall we exhaust our little strength in the pursuit of a shadow!—of a sound! Shall a famishing wretch seek to deck his wasted limbs in tinselled ornaments, and not first satisfy the demands, that are most urgent? Now, the most urgent demands of man are, wisdom, virtue, piety!—his truest glory, the testimony of an unstained conscience! Public approbation is equivocal; the heart and the lips are frequently discordant; and he who smiles on us obtrusively in crowded assemblies, will often shake his head contemptuously, if our name arise in the private circle.

That which is immortal is, alone, truly estimable. The transient halo of human

glory may last a single night; but virtue, like the source from which it emanates, is of eternal duration. The wandering lights of public opinion afford no steady ray, to guide us on our path: but we have a sun, that never sets, and around which, even those orbs that appear most eccentric, unwillingly revolve.

The loss of fame is an evil purely imaginary; and should not grieve us equally with the consciousness of errors: these, whilst uncorrected, form a serious cause for sorrow. Yet, this sentiment is far from universal; and a public slight wounds the feelings more deeply, than the secret consciousness of the most degrading propensities. The lashes we inflict upon ourselves are more easily borne, than gentler chastisement from the hand of a stranger. Astonishing inconsistency! to contemplate our faults ourselves with so much apathy, yet to tremble at the apprehension, that they may be discovered

by our fellow mortals. A cold salutation, a disdainful glance, an ungracious refusal, are, to some men, as the stroke of a poignard: substantial evils, they could bear with fortitude; but sink beneath the shadowy nightmare of the mind.

Silent contempt will extinguish calumny, whilst resentment ever rekindles it. We acknowledge the power of our enemy's arm, when we show the wounds it has inflicted; and, by our unmanly wailings, we swell his song of triumph.

The soul, habitually elevated by lofty contemplations, is raised above the assaults of insolence: whilst it dwells on eternity, on the incomprehensible wisdom and unbounded love of the "great first cause," its tranquillity will be as little disturbed by the voice of slander, as are the slumbering waters of the ocean, by the sea-birds' clamour.

We have made a considerable progress in wisdom, when we receive unmerited praise,

and unprovoked censure, with equal indifference. The homage, indeed, of such as are themselves dishonoured, brings with it a sort of taint, from which delicacy will instinctively recoil; and to receive praise, when conscious of deserving reproof, is, to a generous mind, a species of the most refined torture. Every individual may sound the depths of his own heart, and prove whether it be cowardly, and insensible; or brave, compassionate, and devout. Others can form conjectures only concerning us; they see, not our natural, but our artificial state. Let us not then appeal from our own sentence, to that of a stranger.

In certain cases, it is good policy to be the first to speak of our own errors: such open measures embarrass our enemies, and reduce them to silence; since a candid avowal precludes accusation, and disarms resentment.

Slander presents, at least, two advantages: first, by unveiling the calumniator, it enables us to guard against his malice: secondly, by showing us what is apparently the weak point in our character, it warns us to fortify that point against similar attacks, and to make our future life a justification of the past.

The man who writhes at every touch, is supposed to labour under some secret infirmity; and, with equal reason, we pronounce that mind to be in a morbid state, which is hurt by every random expression. The Turks have a proverbial saying, which implies, that the most persevering talker soon grows weary of speaking to one who is deaf. On the same principle, it may be hoped, calumny will tire of assaults, to which no resistance is offered. Of one point, we may be assured; that the less reason we have, ourselves, to doubt the propriety of our conduct, the less curious we shall be, to learn what is said of it in the world.

Some want of attention, on our part, to the feelings of our associates, some slight unkindness, which we have forgotten, but which has secretly rankled in their bosoms, is, frequently, the unsuspected cause of their injurious misrepresentations. Sometimes they originate in mere thoughtlessness, in the love of talking, and the desire of saying what is extraordinary; but very rarely do they spring from unprovoked malice. No human being is exempted from their influence, and we must not flatter ourselves that we shall enjoy an unexampled security. But how alarming is the reflection, that we feel more keenly the upbraidings of men, than the displeasure of our Creator,—to whom all our secret sins are known! Oh! were we but justified in His sight, of how little moment would be the condemnation of our fellow mortals! With undisturbed serenity, might we then appeal from the sentence of the world, to the decision of that

tribunal, where all worldly judgments shall be finally revised and rectified.

Consolatory reflections in a low station.

The man of humble condition, who has been treated with contempt by his superiours, should reflect on the erroneous views, which persons of elevated rank are accustomed to take, of the retired paths of life; and on the little value they are taught to place, on every thing ungilded by the splendour, which surrounds themselves. Then, directing his investigation to his own character, he should ascertain, whether want of merit, on his part, may not have had some share in causing the slight, of which he complains. On the other hand, let him, who is foremost in rank, take care that he be pre-eminent also in merit; let him approach the nearest to perfection; and not only show the road that leads to virtue, but pioneer the way.

To disarm the enemies of our country, and subdue our own passions; to increase in wisdom and humility, as we increase in glory; to oppose the vices of our companions, yet maintain our place in their affections; to silence prejudice and partiality, and listen to equity alone; to pardon much in others, whilst we need little pardon for ourselves;—this is greatness, truly worthy of admiration! superiority, which all men would exult to acknowledge! Independent on rank, or wealth, it consists, not in degrading others, but in ennobling our own nature.

Humility is the surest preservative from humiliation. The lowest round on the ladder of life, is the most secure; it is the only permanent station: though the proud and the ambitious regard it with disdain, the man, to whom providence has assigned it, may be thankful.

Have you never felt your own insignificance, when standing alone, and, as it were, stripped of adventitious circumstances? Were you never annihilated in your own eyes, on comparing yourself with those wonderful works of God, which absorb in astonishment and admiration the mind that contemplates them? Sensations like these might, surely, teach us our own littleness, and reconcile us to the humblest condition. Yet more: there are times, when the man, thoroughly acquainted with his own heart, must look on himself with deep abasement, and abhorrence: his sole support must then arise from the aid promised to rectify his evil propensities; self-complacency is extinguished by the sense of sinfulness; and by a sympathy with the guilt of those, of whose fallen nature he participates. It is not, then, by the disregard of the great ones of the world, that a man of reflection and sensibility is brought to feel his own

nothingness. He has measured the mere point that he occupies, among countless tribes of animated beings! on the wide expanse of the earth! amidst myriads of celestial globes! He has considered, that few of his fellow creatures have any knowledge of him; that yet fewer think of him in absence; and fewer still, are influenced by his conduct, or opinions: and he, moreover, finds himself surpassed by numbers, in riches, power, learning, wisdom, virtue! Such meditations cherish in his mind “that loveliest grace—humility.”

If, by his lowly station, he be debarred from connexion with the affluent, he is also free from the solicitations of the needy; less in danger of committing injustice; less affected by the caprice of the public; less tempted to sacrifice peace, sincerity, and dignity at the shrine of fashion.

Oh! who that has known the sweets of domestic privacy, would willingly resign

them! Who that has enjoyed healthful slumbers on a low and narrow bed, would exchange them for the restless tossings of disease, beneath a silken canopy! The lowliest lot, cheered by content, is blessed beyond the highest station, exposed to the secret gnawings of chagrin! In vain would “the gilded vessel” allure us to her deck, if we knew that “the sweeping whirlwind” awaited her departure from the haven.

Those, who live in splendour, often suffer more from actual poverty, than the peasant in his clay-built cottage. Eagerly and anxiously do they seek the means of providing costly entertainments for a host of strangers, whom they term acquaintance; and while displaying in public a profusion, tasteless to themselves, are, in private, pinched by the necessities of their craving families; harrassed by the importunity of creditors; and distracted by the encreasing disorder of their affairs. They defraud

themselves of the common conveniences of life, that the voice of the multitude may proclaim them wealthy; and their grandeur derives its highest value, from the admiration of the plebeian throng, whom, nevertheless, they affect to despise.

Ambition demands a theatre for the display of her gigantic form! Privacy, self-communion, domestic pleasures, are incompatible with her genius; and dearly does she purchase, the pedestal she delights to mount! The great vulgar, and the little, are actuated by the same spirit, and the same principles; the only difference is, that sounding titles are bestowed upon the actions of the former; while those of the latter, receive the epithets they really deserve.

Montaigne observes, that the chief seats are generally seized by men of the meanest capacities: and that superiority of fortune is seldom found united to extraordinary mental endowments. “Whilst,” says he, “the

upper end of a table is engaged in discussing the merits of the latest fashion, or the flavour of some foreign wine; the flashes of genuine wit, passing at the lower end, are entirely disregarded." Elevated rank, and high command are coveted, because their prominent advantages strike the eye, whilst their internal penalties are mostly concealed; and the insignificance of the man is lost in the splendour of his station. This prejudice in favour of greatness has, however, its advantage: it incites the populace to respect and obey their superiours, and thus promotes public tranquillity.

We are inclined to attribute actions, that have extensive influence, to some proportionately weighty motive; but in this we are mistaken: both ordinary, and extraordinary events originate in trifling causes. Actuated by the same passions, the peasant wrestles with his neighbour, and the prince declares war against a rival potentate; the commoner

chastises his disobedient servant, and the sovereign desolates a rebellious province. The will of each party is equally arbitrary; but their powers are different: as the fly, and the elephant are guided by similar appetites and instincts, though the magnitude of the quadruped, so greatly exceeds that of the insect.

Diffidence, when carried to excess, suspends the powers of the understanding, unstrings the nerves, and gives a tremulous accent to the voice. Let not the elevation of the great abase you; nor their splendour dazzle your sight. Respect them, because they are your superiours; obey them, because they are in authority; esteem them, when they have personal merit; but sink not into that abject timidity, which annihilates a slave before his master. The favour of the powerful, a brilliant reputation, elevated employments, and extensive possessions, render a man, of consequence

in the world which he is speedily to quit: a low estimation of these specious advantages, facilitates his progress, to the world which will never pass away! And shall they retain a supremacy in our hearts? Is the sleep of a prince more sweet than that of his subjects? Are his sensations more refined, or his enjoyments more exquisite than theirs? Nay! is it not evident, that the ease with which he attains the gratification of his desires, deprives him of the zest, with which the middle, and lower orders, enjoy what they have hardly earned, and long awaited? It is thirst, that makes the home-brewed draught appear to sparkle in the untasted cup!

A celebrated wit bids us remark, that those, who usually pass for great, are mostly walking upon stilts. One man is propped up by the credit of a party! another, by elevated birth! and a third, who towers above the crowd, is mounted on heaps of

gold! How little is all this in the sight of our Creator! To *Him*, the legions which subdue the world, are, as insects creeping in the dust!

So great is the diversity of tastes, that we may reasonably hope, some persons will be found to appreciate our talents, and our labours, though they be contemned by the fastidious part of our acquaintance. At the same time, this diversity should check presumptuous expectations; by forewarning us, that many will disapprove that, which has been admired by the partial circle of our friends.

How different soever be the temporary course of the great and the lowly, they both have had the same origin, and, borne forward by the same hand, must terminate their career by the same event! A feeble and transient existence is their sole earthly charter! They bear their treasure in vases of clay,—painted and gilded indeed in

various fashions, but all equally fragile in their texture. The illustrious, and the obscure; the wealthy, and the indigent; become alike the prey of corruption; and as the most brilliant lights, when extinguished, emit an offensive vapour; so the statesman and the conqueror, who have fixed the attention of the universe, on sinking into the bosom of the earth, leave behind them only a fetid atmosphere! A last refuge is prepared for vanity, in the pompous celebration of their obsequies. In these, folly is seen to survive the heart which nourished it. But vainly do men strive to affix to their memories, the dignities, which death has torn from their persons; and to collect the fragments of past glory, (if I may so speak) in florid orations, and pompous inscriptions; these form not a charm, of power to conceal the humiliating image of their loathsome destiny: and the deep shadows of the tomb, rapidly closing over them, obscure the splendour they fondly deemed immortal.

Oh! deplorable blindness of human pride! —which owes its inflation to its very emptiness;—which, from the saddest lessons taught by God, for man's humiliation, weaves to itself the most flattering illusions; —which strives to engrave on brass and marble, the fugitive grandeur of a momentary existence; which would erect a monument to its power upon the shoals on which it perished;—and wrest for itself a possession, even from the empire of death!

An unaffected indifference to riches and titles has ever been accounted the mark of a noble mind: and is it not a contradiction to suppose, that these baubles can confer real greatness? The care with which vanity is concealed, proves it to be attended with disgrace: how much soever a man may cherish this folly, he would blush to have his secret sentiments revealed.

Were we free from pride ourselves, we should not suffer from it in others; who

mortify us by arrogating to themselves, the superiority we had claimed; and by diminishing the self-importance we had fostered. By restless efforts to surpass our companions, we irritate them against us; and convert into enemies, those, whom a more humble conduct might have secured as friends.

Pride! vanity! presumption! what have mortals to do with you! How do you blind us to our insignificance, by raising visions of our own importance!—the importance of beings, whose exit from the scenes of life will scarcely be remarked!

Paradoxical as it may sound, that man is fortunate, from whom fortune flies. So infatuating are her favours, that we believe ourselves deserving of every honour she bestows; and think it needless to aim at higher degrees of merit, when we have already obtained success. A man of rank and fortune is apt to identify with himself,

all the appendages that surround him: he feels a property in the talents which he can command; and never reduces himself to his inherent value as an individual.

Amid the bustle of the world, a pious man preserves a sanctuary within his breast, a sacred solitude, to which he can at all times retreat:—the tranquil asylum of real liberty, which no profane intruder enters. Thence he sees, unmasked, the deceptions of the world without. Free from ambition, retirement has for him no terrors: communion with God, and his own soul yields him more delight, than familiar intercourse with all the world denominates illustrious. Seclusion is so greatly preferable, to the hurry and embarrassments of public life, that a wise man would chuse perpetual solitude, rather than an absolute deprivation of it, were he reduced to the alternative. He would consider it the greatest misfortune, to be known to all the world, and remain unknown to himself.

In the peace of retirement, self-knowledge is best obtained. The soul, no longer distracted by an infinity of objects, is at leisure to turn its thoughts upon itself. It perceives its sinfulness, and becomes humble; it feels its weakness, and becomes diffident; it is convinced that no earthly good can satisfy its desires, and rises above this world, to repose them in the bosom of its Creator.

One of the principal dangers of the great world is, that it contains many vicious, yet fascinating characters, whom we must either detest or admire: in the first case, we render them our implacable enemies; in the second, we are insensibly corrupted by their example. What a privilege, to be far removed from regions, where vigilance and circumspection can never be laid aside!

The man, who loves retirement, will hold every species of licentious revelry in abhorrence. He will find his pleasures, in study,

in meditation, in the contemplation of nature, the performance of his duties, and the exercise of the social and devout affections.

Men endeavour to justify their eagerness for worldly advancement, by expressing a contempt for those, who are satisfied with mediocrity; and by repeatedly asserting, that “ we were created, not to live for ourselves, but for the public.” Their real deference to this axiom will, however, be suspected, whilst they are observed to be principally governed, in every proceeding, by a spirit of self-interest. Let us not wish for greatness, lest the honour we receive from man, make us forgetful of that we owe to God; lest we become impatient of every law, but our own will; and lest our *power* to commit sin, seconding our *inclination*, lead us into vices, from which a humble station would have secured us. Enervated by the sweet poison of flattery, we might become too delicate to endure the whole-

some bitters of truth; which, by the great especially, must be sought with care, since no one will venture to offer them unsolicited to their acceptance. Every increased degree of elevation is an additional obstacle to the approach of truth; raising men to a height, at which “her voice is heard, at first, but faintly, and then, heard no more.”

Far from envying, I would compassionate the situation of men, chained, by the obligations of their rank, to stations, where they are a spectacle to all mankind; and, in effect, the slaves of those beneath them! Born to the purple, it has not, for them, the charm of novelty; yet the cares and disquietudes it covers, present themselves, every hour, under new and alarming forms. Whilst they offer a delusive phantom of felicity, the thorns of the festive garland deeply penetrate their temples. Sighing for the obscurity of those, who envy them their elevation, they seem to display its glories for the

benefit of others, and to reserve its burdens for their own portion. When no admiring eye beholds us, we care not for the toys of vanity: this is one of the advantages attendant on "the sequestered vale of life." Many a mansion would be decked in a less costly style, were it open to relatives, and familiar friends alone.

There is as much wisdom shown in the resignation of a post, which we are no longer able to fill with credit, as there was in exerting the powers, that qualified us for obtaining it. Advancing age, or declining health, often furnish opportunities for a retreat so full of dignity. How noble is it to yield, to more efficient hands, an honourable, or lucrative employment, which we might still retain! Of such magnanimity that man will be most capable, who has acquired a rational indifference to temporal grandeur. By seizing the proper moment to retire, he will not only crown his memory with honour, but spare himself the shame of a dismissal.

Whoever is resolved to push his fortune at court, must compound to relinquish independence and repose. He must often speak in contradiction to his real sentiments; and profess attachment, where he feels no friendship: he must praise what he does not admire; live long on hope; perform a thousand unrequited services; must enter into the passions of other men; and regulate his temper, by their humours: in short, he must qualify himself for scenes, where powers of sufferance are still more requisite, than powers of action; where calumny finds ready auditors; and innocence—rarely an advocate!

Could riches and honours make the heart lighter, they would be worthy our pursuit: but the peasant laughs with far more glee than his wealthy lord; who, having reached the summit of dignities, grows weary of the sad pre-eminence, and sighs to descend to a more social level. The ties, which bind the

former to his cottage, and his family, sit lightly on him; whilst the latter, shackled by numerous encumbrances, feels his movements subject to controul, and his designs to disappointment, from his lowest menial.

It is true, that the consideration and affluence, attendant on a high station; and the power it confers, of advancing our friends, and mortifying our enemies; too generally awaken ambition and cupidity. We contemplate greatness on its brightest side, and in its most attractive form; but, were we to penetrate beyond these fair appearances, were we to consider the assiduous labour, which an important post demands; to reflect, that health is often sacrificed; the mind weighed down with care; domestic ties relaxed, or severed; and all, for a glory, vanishing like a morning star, and which we must speedily quit for the darkness and silence of the tomb; were we seriously to reflect on these things, far from coveting

such a lot, it would become the object of our dread.

High birth, it must be allowed, gives a man peculiar facilities of distinguishing himself during his sublunary passage; but, when the great leveller death arrives, piety and virtue are seen to be the only permanent distinctions; and the crown of glory, reserved in heaven for the righteous, is found to be the only diadem of imperishable worth.

Consolatory reflections, in a dependant situation.

By cheerful obedience we avoid what is most irksome in a state of subjection,—the being obliged to act contrary to our will. Voluntary acquiescence is not painful; the suffering lies in constrained submission; in the being dragged to our duty, not in freely entering on it.

In the case before us, are we not then the authors of our own misery? Not only do we increase the difficulty of our appointed tasks, by setting our mind against them, but we actually disable ourselves from performing them: for however easy a thing may be in itself, and how adequate soever may be our powers to its execution, it becomes almost impracticable, when the mind is strongly steeled against it.

To command well, is far more difficult, than to obey implicitly. To do the first, we must be able to guide, and to restrain, the will of others;—we, who have so much trouble in governing our own! Surely it is more easy to follow, than to lead;—to walk in the path traced for us, than to form a fresh track for ourselves;—to answer only for our own conduct, than to be responsible for the conduct of others also!

It is often so very difficult to decide, and we are so liable to be misled in our choice,

that I could not but think it an advantage, to have an enlightened director, on whom these duties might devolve; who would point out, determinately, what I was to do, and what to avoid. To such an one, I should gladly resign the authority I now possess over my actions, with all my responsibility for their consequences.

Obedience is of infinite importance, in maintaining the harmony of society. If command were not vested in one person supremely, the opposing passions and interests of different individuals, would produce incalculable disorders. The perfection of obedience excludes even reasoning upon the expediency of the command: it is our part to conform to the directions given;—to analyze them, belongs to those, with whom they originate.

The most odious of all servitude is that, which enslaves us to our ungoverned appetites, passions, and prejudices. I would ask

with Horace: “ Who is the man, that may be denominated free ?” It is he, who has obtained the mastery over his passions: whom neither poverty, bonds, nor death, can terrify: who despises flattery, and is a world to himself! He, on whom the rudest strokes of fortune fall unfelt. Whatever be his condition, such a man, and such alone, enjoys true liberty!.

Reflections consolatory to persons of obscure birth.

It is far more noble, to be renowned for virtue, than for illustrious descent: the honour of the first, belongs to a man himself; of the last, solely to his progenitors.

Sallust reports Marius to have said: “ The advantage of noble birth has indeed been denied me; but my personal achievements form a better title to glory. The injustice of those, who reproach me on this

head, is, in truth, extreme; they refuse to allow, that *my own* valour has exalted *me*, as much as the valour of *their ancestors* has elevated *them*."

Why should people affect astonishment, or contempt, at seeing the lowly-born rise, and ennoble themselves? Must not the most illustrious families have had a similar beginning? A noble race, to speak of it in favourable terms, is one, whose plebeian blood has evaporated slowly; an ignoble race, is one, whose patrician blood has undergone the very same process. Those, who have no other claim to nobility, than their birth, are usually foremost in priding themselves upon the antiquity of their genealogy. The most ancient dynasty must, however, have its *ne plus ultra*; a line, beyond which it is involved in obscurity. The higher men remount towards their source, the more nearly do they find themselves upon a level; and when they have

reached it, they perceive, that one simple fountain has sent forth streams so various!

The most valuable appendage of noble birth is, the obligation it entails on its possessors, not to degenerate from the virtue of their ancestors. Armorial bearings, titles, and all the exterior marks of nobility, attract attention, but confer no real dignity: alas! they but draw down a heavier weight of obloquy, where they are not suitably supported; and it is no slight charge, to have hereditary greatness to illustrate! “The splendour of your house,” (observes Petrarch, in one of his letters,) “deprives you of the privilege of concealment, and the sweets of repose and solitude. All your private actions will be publicly discussed; for your illustrious progenitors seem to have placed spies around you; to note down every act, and observe whether you faithfully emulate their high example.”

The man, with whom the nobility of a family originates, is more truly noble, than those, of succeeding ages, *in* whom, and not *by* whom, it is continued. Noble birth has been well compared to a cipher;—of no importance, when it stands alone; but increasing tenfold the value of any figure, to which it may be added.

Dust, now mouldering, forms the soil, whence hereditary honours spring! and should it be extolled above manly vigour, occupied in promoting human happiness? Is a name, gathered from the tombs, to be prized beyond deeds, similar to those, by which it has been embalmed?

Grieve not, you, to whom the Creator has assigned a humble origin; nor think yourselves debased, by the lowly station of your parents: but let your virtue, like the morning sun, reflect a radiance on the mists from which it rose!

Consolatory reflections in pain and sickness.

An excessive fondness for pleasure, when in health, increases our sensibility to the pains and deprivations attendant on a state of sickness.

It has been observed, with justice, that violent agonies, either speedily exhaust themselves, or put an end to our existence: their intensity is a certain proof, that they are drawing near their termination. Pain is an enemy, who grows more daring from our cowardice; but who will, in his turn, fly, if we oppose him courageously.

In times of sickness, the tenderness of friends conveys a balm, to describe which, all language is too weak! Yet our firmest support should still be sought from above; and the soul be, as it were, withdrawn from the body, that she may hold undisturbed converse with herself, and her Creator; find in Him her chief delight, and thus free her-

self, as much as possible, from the influence of her earthly partner.

I would appeal to those, whose enjoyments, in the days of health, were of a spiritual nature, to declare, whether, in sickness, they have not felt the happiest results, from such a triumph of the soul over the body: whether, at such seasons, the consolations of religion were not most sensibly experienced; and the Holy Spirit then found to be indeed the Comforter?

*Consolatory reflections on the loss of fortune
and friends.*

How much soever men may possess of the good things of this world, their minds are still liable to be wrung by grief, and their bodies to be agonized by disease. Why, then, should we so universally lament the loss of fortune; since it is allowed to have no power, to secure us from evil. Rather,

let us enjoy what yet remains, and, if we possess only what is common to all, still be so thankful for our share in the general partition, as not to repine at the loss of peculiar advantages. Ingenuity in tormenting ourselves is, assuredly, a most worthless talent; one, which will only add to our deprivations, the tortures of impatience and despair.

We should regard the possessions of this world, as merely lent to us; and, when deprived of them, consider that we return them, not that they are wrested from us. They cannot always remain; and, by loosening our hold, we may half resign them, before they are forcibly taken away.

Under the loss of relatives, or friends, let us give to nature, to gratitude, and to friendship, the tribute so justly due; but, having done so, let us not refuse to the influence of religion, what time will not fail to obtain. Let the tears of grief be dried, through a sentiment of filial resignation; nor

let us leave, to an inferiour power, the honour of wiping them away! Our own death will shortly follow that of the friend, whom we deplore! The same voyage will conduct us to the same port: a temporary separation was inevitable; and he has reached the harbour a little before ourselves!

*Consolatory reflections, for persons engaged
in a laborious line of life.*

The habitual practice of labour, gives a facility in performing what is most difficult; and braces the nerves to a patient endurance of pain itself. Even the labour, that is apparently superfluous, will, in this view, be found beneficial. Much repose renders the body heavy and feeble; and induces an indolence, fatal to every virtuous exertion. Our intervals of leisure, themselves, should not be seasons of idleness; lest relaxation of mind produce a relaxation in duty; and gradually

render every degree of toil, insupportable. Whilst doing nothing, we learn to do evil: for idleness is not so much a single vice, as an introduction to every species of vice.

Whoever dislikes employment must eventually feel the inconveniences of poverty: for, in idleness, there is a perpetual waste, unreplenished by gain. Many costly recreations, also, are needed, to dissipate the lassitude of a vacant mind; and the energy, necessary to support our own interests, melts insensibly away.

Men often become ridiculous, by attempting labours, which have no reference to their appropriate professions; and in which the world is persuaded they *cannot*,—or at least *ought* not to excel. An ecclesiastic should not undertake to teach military tactics; nor an engineer, to write a commentary on the Epistles of Saint Paul: we place more confidence in a solicitor, when he unravels the intricacies of a case in civil law;

than when he proposes to demonstrate the quadrature of a circle. The inclination to step beyond our situation in life, under pretence of doing more good, than we could effect within its limits, is, nevertheless, very general: for, there belongs to the human mind, a degree of restlessness, which occasions it to feel pain, in being confined solely to professional avocations.

Persons, destined for solitude, wish, under the pretext of benevolence, to renew an intercourse with the world. Not content with the care of their own safety, but desirous of showing, that they are qualified to assist others; they imperceptibly entangle themselves in business and intrigues, from which their line of life exempted them; and, while they believe themselves intent on saving the souls of their fellow creatures, they greatly endanger their own. On the other hand, some who are called to action, in the service of mankind, perversely give

themselves up to contemplation. A magistrate, for instance, from a mistaken idea of devotion, shall become inaccessible to those, who have need of his assistance; and, wholly absorbed by such solitary exercises, as God has not enjoined, shall neglect to do justice to the oppressed; and shall weary the patience of the supplicant, to whom the All Merciful has commanded him to lend a ready ear.

How many misguided women give to works of supererogation, a time, which they take from the performance of essential duties! Whilst they are running from conventicle to conventicle, and from one controversial coterie to another, they omit the services, which their Creator more especially requires of them;—the sacred ones, of a meek and affectionate submission to their husbands, a careful education of their children, and a judicious regulation of their domestic concerns.

We should devote ourselves to the employment, specifically allotted to us by providence; and, when obliged to engage in such as are beyond our appropriate sphere of action, should supply our deficiencies, by consulting those who may be more acquainted with the subject in question: so shall we acquit ourselves, with propriety, in the various relations of life; and avoid a ridiculous interference with the pursuits of others.

Persuasives against undue apprehension of future events.

We should, in all situations, repress uneasy apprehension respecting future events, whether certain, or uncertain; fortifying ourselves with prudence, against the misfortunes, which are probable; and arming ourselves with resolution, to meet those, which are unavoidable. Many things inspire

a fear, which the event will not justify: but, of all evils, fear is the greatest, and the most incurable. Other calamities are such only for a definite period: pain endures no longer than its cause continues to operate; but fear is a permanent suffering; excited, not only by what does,—but by what does not,—nay even by what never may exist. Those who live under the fear of possible misery, already suffer what they dread. All other misfortunes have a termination,—have certain limits;—but this is unbounded as the human imagination!

O hapless humanity! how long wilt thou inflict upon thyself voluntary evils, in addition to those, to which thy original frailty has subjected thee!

Fear, the offspring of danger, betrays us into the power of her parent. Whilst urging us to escape, and seeming to point out his toils, she entangles us in them, and deprives us of the power of extricating ourselves: the

terrified, fluttering, soul sinks to the bottom of the snare, a defenceless prey to the enemy! This perfidious guard impels us to fly, when none pursue; and raises a cloud, through which we mistake our friends for foes.

Constant misery attends the ill-starred victims of fear: the present moment,—all they can call their own,—is embittered by anticipations of a future, which never may arrive; and they consent to *be* wretched, because they may possibly *become* so! Do we not evince a determination to be miserable, when, by the aid of imagination, we force ourselves into the regions of misfortune, and provoke her aggression? Like those infatuated wretches, who put a violent end to their existence, through fear of death; we too often, by vain apprehensions, draw down upon ourselves real evils; and secure a considerable portion of suffering, whatever be the lot providence has assigned us. Is it harsh to say, that we then court mi-

sery; and seek to establish our claim to affliction?

That misfortunes, whilst in perspective, often affect us more sensibly, than when we feel their actual pressure, is visible, in the content and happiness frequently enjoyed by the poor, and the exiled; though few could contemplate indigence, or banishment, as likely to become their own fate, without extreme anguish.

The trials assigned us are duly proportioned to our strength: let us not then add to their weight, by miseries of our own creation. "The natural shocks that flesh is heir too," might suffice to wean us from a world we love too well, without artificial tortures of our own invention. Living pictures of woe meet us at every stage of our journey, and render it unnecessary for us to dip our pencils in the sable hues of a dis-tempered imagination. Thus far is certain: *all* the disasters, which crowd on the mind

of an apprehensive person, cannot possibly happen; and many blessings, on which he could not calculate, may be in store for him.

But there is yet a more important point of view, in which to consider this subject. An habitual apprehensiveness concerning future events, argues a want of reliance on the protection of the Almighty; a want of faith in the gracious promise he has given, to provide for all, who will "cast their care upon Him." Surely the precepts, which forbid anxiety for the morrow, are most wisely and mercifully adapted to the propensity of our nature, which we have been examining! A constant recurrence to them, and to the encouraging assurances, by which they are seconded, would banish from the mind every fear, excepting that most salutary one, stiled "the beginning of wisdom;" and would finally establish in our hearts, a peace and serenity, that nothing earthly could destroy!

Consolatory reflections in poverty.

Who will venture to speak in favour of poverty whilst the desire of riches has firm possession of almost every heart? Yet, were we to lay aside prejudice, and balance fairly the evil against the good; we should perceive, that though riches procure us many conveniences, they not only cannot give happiness; but that they even nip it in the bud, by breeding the canker-worm of care.

Let us then cherish that train of serious thought, and those habits of moderation, which render the prospect of a state of poverty, in no way alarming. A man is not indigent from the smallness of his possessions; so much as from allowing his wishes to exceed them: and he, who has the secret of contracting his desires, is in reality richer, than he is, who, without this power, has the means of considerably encreasing his income. The wretched being, whose soul is

wholly intent on adding to the length of his rentroll, on enlarging his already spacious mansions, and lengthening his splendid retinue; satiated, but not satisfied, feels all the pangs of poverty, whilst he compares his present possessions, with those he sighs to obtain.

Though the covetous be not deprived of any part of their wealth, they never fail to account as losses, all that they have been unable to acquire; and, consequently, they are, as to their feelings, perpetually in a state of adversity. These imaginary reverses, indeed, affect them more deeply, and more effectually prevent their enjoyment of the good they possess, than real losses do, a man of a disinterested temper. We are deceived, if we suppose that the rich support the diminution of their property, with more fortitude than the poor. Large bodies are found to be as sensible to the pain of a wound, as those of a diminu-

tive size : and the feathers plucked from the ostrich, are surrendered with as violent a struggle, as the down brushed from the wing of the butterfly.

If we allow our wishes to roam beyond the limits of our fortune, they will carry us into visionary regions; where the mind, bewildered amidst boundless prospects, will find no resting place; and exhausted by its endeavours to appropriate these shadowy domains, will be incapacitated for the enjoyment of the substantial good, already in its power.

Were we all to confine our wants, to the simple requisitions of nature; the greater number of those persons, who now complain of poverty, would perceive themselves to be really in affluence. That hunger be appeased, thirst allayed, the body decently clothed, and sheltered from the inclemencies of weather;—such are the demands of nature; and where these are satisfied, the

heart should be lifted in gratitude to the bountiful bestower of the blessing.

Superfluities are the sources of much disquiet; not only from the contrivance and labour requisite to obtain them; but also, from their blending so readily with our habits, and soon becoming so necessary to our comfort, as to occasion us great uneasiness, when we are deprived of them. Perhaps, we at first accustomed ourselves to a particular indulgence, not because we desired it; but, because it was common among our acquaintance: an unsafe motive this, when not supported by more stable reasons, for the formation of any habit whatsoever. This propensity to thoughtless imitation is the fruitful stem, whence spring most of the pernicious customs prevalent in the world. Men follow, without reflection, the example of those around them: as soon as an error becomes general, it is exempted from examination, and acquires the force of a principle.

We are not aware of the number of our superfluities, until a change of circumstances obliges us to relinquish them: yve then discover, with astonishment, that, in effect, “man wants but little here below;” and that, *that* little may be procured without difficulty, in almost every situation; though the cravings of luxury could not be satisfied, by all the riches of a Midas.

“How barren must your country be,” said a Brasilian Chief, to one of the Spanish plunderers, “since it forces a whole tribe to cross the wide seas, in search of food!”

It is far more easy, to live with comfort in poverty, than to live contentedly, in affluence. The poor man slakes his thirst at the brook, and feels thankful for the refreshment. The rich man frets, because the cup from which he drinks, is not so costly, as that of his ostentatious neighbour. The labourer cheerfully shares with his children, the vegetable meal his industry has pro-

cured: whilst the epicure successively discards from his table, the fish, the venison, and the game, which he peevishly declares, his blundering cooks have spoiled!

O ye blind worshippers of fortune! arrest your career, for a little space! and tell me, whether riches can purchase for you the favour of your Creator? Whether, when the sentence of death is gone forth against you, they can, for one moment, delay its execution? Whether they can smoothe your passage to the grave; or follow you within its narrow confines? You reply, that you accumulate wealth, in order to bequeath it to your children.—But is not the earth a nursing mother to them, as well as to yourself? From her bosom, can they not draw the purest nourishment? Will the sources, which supplied health and vigour to your ancestors, be denied to your posterity? Survey the course of the world, and you will find, that the rich are the slaves of fear;

whilst the poor are the votaries of hope. The fatigue, the responsibility, the apprehension, inseparable from large possessions, are unknown to the man, who each morning receives from Heaven, the bread of the day on which he is entering.

That a sensation of shame, which ought to be confined to guilt, is so frequently attendant upon poverty, must be ascribed to the pride inherent in our nature: that identical principle, which sometimes displays itself so disgustingly, in the arrogance of the wealthy. When indigence has been occasioned by imprudence, it is the recollection of the fault, and not the exposure of its consequences, that should call forth the blushes of humility.

Where the mind is embellished by literature and science, and the heart enriched by manly, generous, and pious sentiments; though our fare be scanty, and our clothing unornamented; "though the rich deride,"

and “the proud disdain,”—the *sovereign good* will still be ours; and the enjoyment of our existence remain unaffected by the absence of fortune’s favours. We shall feel the difference between true and false glory, and not forfeit the former, by a degrading homage to the latter.

Religion, rightly understood, and heartily embraced, renders us invulnerable by fortune. It makes us more wealthy, than the rich; more noble, than the titled. It preserves us from trembling in the presence of the powerful; dazzled by their pomp, or intimidated by their pride. But the soul, unsupported by this ennobling principle, becomes timid and abject in poverty: and, by that very debasement, draws down the contempt, from which it shrinks. Nothing is more common than to see a needy man, when introduced into the apartments of the opulent, at once forsaken by those powers of reasoning, and that play of fancy, which dis-

tinguished him among his penniless companions. The fact is, he fears to maintain his own opinions, however well founded, in opposition to those of the wealthy patron, whose assistance he requires; and prefers the being considered deficient in abilities, to the hazard of meeting an irritated opponent, where he wishes to find a benefactor.

Bruyere has given so natural, and highly finished a portrait, of a timid, bashful son of poverty, that I am tempted to introduce it.

“The sallow complexion, hollow eyes, and meagre visage of Phedo, proclaim their affinity to his long and lean figure. His manner is absent; and, with much understanding, he wears an air of imbecility.—He places himself on the very edge of his chair; speaks in a low, inarticulate voice; condemns public measures; complains of the age, and the state of affairs in general; coughs frequently, with his hat before his face; but checks the inclination to a sneeze,

as if it were a crime. He seldom ventures to bring forward the information he possesses; and, when he makes the attempt, acquits himself ill, and ends abruptly. Conscious of wearying his auditors, his recitals are brief and inanimate; they afford no amusement, and awaken no interest. Yet, when others speak, he writhes his countenance into a smile, and applauds with eagerness; professing himself to be precisely of their opinion. He flies to offer every little service in his power; is obsequious, officious, fulsome!

His allusions to his own affairs are always mysterious, often false. His mind is apprehensive; and enslaved to superstitious scruples. Sound sleep, and peaceful dreams, are strangers to his pillow. He walks with a light and cautious step, seemingly fearful of treading the earth too roughly: seldom are his downcast eyes raised upon the passenger; and never does he join the social

group, collected to enjoy the pleasures of unreserved conversation: stealing behind the seat of one of the party, he listens fearfully, and retires if noticed. He fills no place, occupies no room: closely folded in his threadbare cloak; his elbows pressed against his sides; his hat lowered over his eyes; he glides, unfelt, through the most crowded apartment; and escapes, unsaluted, and unperceived:—Phedo is poor!"

It has been acknowledged, in all ages, that riches do not banish care; but only transfer it, from one subject to another: and that while they provide for the enjoyment of many pleasures; they lay the foundation of numberless anxieties. Nevertheless, men, in the present day, are as earnestly bent on their acquisition, as if the contrary had been demonstrated. They feel the insufficiency of money to bestow happiness; they see the poor, in the enjoyment of more tranquillity than the rich; yet, lashed on, as it were, by

an irresistible hand, they expose their health, their lives, and even their eternal welfare in the pursuit.

In ranging through the dwellings of the opulent, should a sensation of envy begin to "stir within us," it might be seasonably checked, by such reflections as the following.

A multiplicity of houses would not multiply my being: were I master of cities, I must still remain a simple individual! Millions could not purchase me a second body; or even an additional limb! I can possibly occupy but one room, at any given moment! To what purpose then, are these numerous apartments! this superabundance of furniture! this swarm of servants. Were my possessions to increase ever so greatly, my faculties for enjoyment would not increase with them; on the contrary, they must diminish with every successive year!

Though men prize riches highly, it is evident that God esteems them not; since his most devoted children are those, on whom he usually bestows the smallest portion; whereas the wicked frequently receive them in abundance.

The dangers attendant on riches are very easily pointed out. They give a powerful stimulus to the passions; rouse the dormant evil of our hearts; and, by rendering the commission of vice easy, increase our tendency towards it. But the absolute power, which riches confer upon their possessor, constitutes their most inevitable danger. All obstacles give way before them, and the wildest irregularities are the too common result. They offer to the voluptuous, the means of gratifying their senses with criminal pleasures, only the more pernicious from their actual refinement. They aid the ambitious to trample down all who stand in their path; and secure for them the elevated

posts, to which they proudly aspire. They provide the revenged with the means of infusing their rancorous venom into the portion of the man who has offended them; and of adding a keener edge to the dagger they prepare for him. Riches spread for the slothful the enervating couch, which invites them to slumber; and hold before the coward, the shield, which preserves him from merited infamy. Hypocrites avail themselves of their aid, to dazzle the eyes of the world with deeds of ostentatious munificence, worthless in the sight of Heaven, because unprompted by an upright motive.

Wealth too frequently lies open to the reproach, of having been either amassed by sordid care, lavished in sensuality, hoarded by avarice, dissipated by extravagance, or lost through the fatal passion of gaming.

The religion, (if indeed he pretend to any) of the man whose heart is devoted to gold, is a hollow and sacrilegious profession.

His faith,—an impious trust in riches, leading him to regulate his conduct, by the maxims of interest, instead of by the laws of God. His hope,—a criminal anticipation of the gains promised by his short-sighted calculations. His charity,—and can the avaricious man have charity? have “love to man, springing from love to God?” Impossible! His grovelling affections are fixed on the perishing possessions after which he toils; and which he loves beyond all mankind, his Creator, and the heavenly treasures offered to those who, for His sake, provide for the poor and destitute.

His moral qualities also are of a very questionable nature. If he have fortitude, it is exerted only in supporting the labours, to which the love of gain has subjected him. If he have prudence, it is shown, merely, in guarding against the losses, which avarice makes him apprehend. If he be temperate, it is solely to avoid the excesses,

which might diminish his cherished hoards. If he be just, it is only when the support of the right cause promotes his own pecuniary interests. If he abstain from sensual pleasures, the same master-passion prescribes his self-denial, and adulterates the purity of his conduct. He despises the luxuries and conveniences of life, endures hardships and privations of every kind ; but it is still avarice that steels him against the seductions of the former, and the rigours of the latter. In a continued course of agitation, suspicion, and low intrigue, his days pass on : the future presents to his imagination, houses in flames ; lands wasted by war and famine ; public and private credit annihilated ; yet these appalling scenes, and panic terrors, but increase his avidity for gain ; and afford him a futile plea for further accumulation. Meanwhile the general want and misery, on which he dwells, receive no mitigation from his hand. Such is the unexaggerated por-

trait of this sordid vice : and can a spectre be presented to the human mind, better calculated to deter from the slightest assimilation to its features ?—to features odious in the eyes of man, and in which the image of God is no where to be traced !

Were happiness to be purchased by riches, they would, unquestionably, be a rational subject of desire : but before we suffer any thing to usurp the first place in our affections, and to become the principal object of our pursuit, it might be prudent to examine a little, the degree of satisfaction enjoyed by those who are already possessed of it. The preceding reflections present this examination ; and the unavoidable conclusion is,—that the rich are never happy : they may appear so, to the eye of strangers, but they do not feel so, in themselves. This has been, for ages, affirmed by moral and religious writers ; and no rich man has yet stepped forward to prove the assertion un-

true. That, which is acquired with toil and difficulty, possessed with anxiety, yet lost with anguish, cannot rationally be accounted a blessing.

The spacious firmament, the sun and stars in their resplendent majesty, and all the enchantment of nature's charms, are insipid to Mondanus, merely because they are common. He sighs for a palace, for silken canopies, and gilded furniture:—his vows are heard; and, is he happy? Ah, no! for the furniture, the canopies, the palaces of some among his acquaintance surpass his own; and it is not any actual quality in an object, that can give him pleasure; it is, the idea that he possesses, what others want.

Might not reason free us from a number of these fancied wants; since necessity often destroys them, without diminishing our comfort? Our eagerness after riches gives them a brilliancy in our eyes, which,

upon their attainment, we discover not to be inherent in them, but to have arisen from the velocity of our own pursuit. The fewer our wants, the more firmly grounded is our independance: luxury and ambition have made more slaves, than poverty, or lowly birth.

But, whilst we condemn the love of money, let us beware of despising indiscriminately the possessors of it. The character of M**** will show, that a rich man may be truly estimable. M**** proves his independance of the gifts of fortune, lavishly bestowed upon him, not only by his words, but also by his actions. He is not therefore blameable for possessing riches; though he would be so, could he not live contentedly without them; did he not employ them usefully; or, did he find in them a source of vanity. There is no criminality in inhabiting the most splendid dwelling; though to be dissatisfied with a

simple cottage, when such alone is allotted, marks a mind deficient in many, and important virtues. The fault lies, not in the enjoyment of wealth and honours, but in a restless ambition, and craving desire of them.

A truly wise man does not *love* money, yet would he rather possess it himself, than be obliged to beg, or borrow it. Riches find an entrance into his purse, but none into his heart: for, though he rejects them not, he accepts them only as a means of exercising those liberal dispositions, which a state of indigence too often cramps. He knows that there are more persons in distress, who might benefit by his pecuniary aid, than there are virtuous persons, who would profit by the example of his patience.

The prominent virtues of poverty are fortitude and activity; but affluence opens a field for the developement of numberless good qualities;—temperance, beneficence,

the love of order;—and some of a higher class, and more rare attainment, such as, the preservation of a humble, self-denying, uncorrupted mind, in the midst of multiplied temptations. Still, though it be the height of glory to live as poor, whilst in the command of wealth, there is much less peril, in not possessing that command.

Consolatory reflections, on the prospect of death.

By a frequent contemplation of death, we familiarize ourselves with the subject and disarm it of its terrors. No meditation is so necessary, because no event can be so certain as that of our dissolution. Let the remembrance of our mortality, then, form the constantly recurring subject of our thoughts; not only during our seasons of retirement, but let it be awakened also, by those daily incidents,—insignificant in the eye of the

world,—yet indubitably designed, as silent monitors of the frail tenure by which we hold our existence. A false step, the falling of a tile, the prick of a thorn, and a thousand such apparent trifles, might prompt the most salutary reflections; might make us sensible that every past hour has brought a reprieve from the grave; and remind us, that the stroke which *must* fall on some day, *may* fall ere the present day have closed!

It will be said, that courageous resolutions are easily formed, when death is beheld as at a distance, but that when it draws near, the same fortitude is no longer felt: that it is not difficult to put on the mail of stoicism, and assume a philosophic tone, whilst the enemy threatens from afar; but that when he wrestles with us face to face; when his cold hand grasps us; the disguise falls off; the cowardice of the soul is proved; its inmost recesses are disclosed; and all its secret sins and weaknesses burst into light.

We shall be told, that fortune often seems to wait the last hour of life, to show the plenitude of her power, by overthrowing, in a moment, the edifice she had employed years to erect; and that she has forced many a man to exclaim with Laberius: "I have lived one day too long!"

Notwithstanding these objections, meditation upon death is highly useful. Were it granted, that previous resolutions always fail us in the closing scene, (a point by no means conceded) it is surely something, if they afford us comfort and support, during the fearful pilgrimage which conducts us to it.

From how many pains, anxieties, and dangers will the grave shield us! And shall we shrink back from our place of refuge? Death is the penalty annexed to the gift of life: we entered this world, upon the condition that we should leave it; and surprise, or murmurs, when we are called on to pay the tribute of mortality, are equally irrational, and ungrateful.

No extraordinary exertion of mind is requisite, to bring the term of our earthly existence before us; since life itself presents a constant image of it.

“Our birth is nothing but our death begun;

“As tapers waste, that instant they take fire.”

One faculty decays, and then another, and another; step by step, we descend towards the tomb; each moment bears us nearer to it; and the last will lay us in its bosom!

What avails the fear of death? Can our terrors prevent, or even delay its approach? And will not the stroke, which severs the thread of life, be rendered doubly severe, by our wilful opposition to it? Whilst any degree of uncertainty attends the expectation of solemn events, considerable strength of mind is necessary, to enable us to contemplate them with calmness: but, when a decree of providence is clearly seen to be irreversible; it might be supposed that com-

mon sense, alone, would dispose us to submit. Death is this irreversible decree; alarms, precautions, all are vain: fear but recoils upon itself, and inflicts a premature, and useless wound.

The man whose heart is fixed below, dreads, and flies it: the madman rashly braves it: but the real christian awaits it, without apprehension, and without impatience.

Some persons seem to fear the actual pain of dying: our last struggle is however, in general, but of short duration; and many a time, in the course of our life, we have, probably endured sufferings, both more acute, and more protracted, than those, which will free us from every earthly pain; and, if our hearts be duly qualified, introduce us into a state of heavenly bliss, to which suffering and sorrow are unknown! Yet we remain all our lifetime, in bondage, through fear of this deliverance!

But what grounds have we for believing, that the stroke of death is, in fact, painful? We know not what it is. Possibly, the sensations attending it may be rather of a pleasing, than of a distressing nature. Faintings, which convey the best idea of it, favour this supposition; and gently “wrap us in forgetfulness.” The soothing nature of sleep, which also affords an image of death, strengthens the probability: at least, we have no assurance that opposite feelings attend dissolution; nor *can* we have such, either from our own experience, or that of others.

You, who share with me in these reflections; you, as well as myself, must descend into the tomb: we both must go, ere long, to that land, whither the journey of life conducts all who were ever born. Those who preceded us have already reached the destined bourn: our contemporaries are hastening towards it, equally with ourselves:

and those who succeed us, must follow in our steps. The high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, the young and the old, the simple and the wise, all run the same career, and must stop at the same goal! How many will launch into eternity, at the same moment with ourselves!

The usual preparatives for death, are far more terrific than death itself: to endure these with calmness, does indeed require fortitude! We are naturally alarmed and overcome by the stifled moanings that we hear; and the tears that are shed around us; by the portentous shake of the physician's head; by the circumlocution employed, in telling us that our dissolution is approaching; by the room, from which air and light are nearly excluded; and the mode of life, so different from that observed in health. These, combined with the melancholy countenances of our friends; our recollection of

the convulsive movements of those, whom we have ourselves seen expire; the image of the grave; of infernal spirits; final judgment; and endless torments; these,—and not the instantaneous transition from one state of existence to another,—fill us with dread, or exercise the courage of the soul. The momentous question, “what is this undetermined state, this unknown country whither I am going?” awakens doubts, in the dying inquirer, whither it will indeed be to *him* a state of happiness: whether his life has been so spent as to afford “the certain hope of a joyful resurrection.” In these apprehensions, *death* itself has no part. *Life*, then, it is, which ought to be viewed with alarm: here the utmost caution, the utmost scrutiny, are rational; and if this has been spent in piety and virtue, a private, sudden, and quiet death is—happiness!

The remembrance of death is a preservative, equally, from intoxication amidst

pleasures; and from despondency, in the days of suffering: whilst the uncertainty, that hangs over the place and time of its arrival, is admirably calculated to keep alive in us perpetual watchfulness.

An admired writer, speaking of himself, says: "I am not melancholy, but I am meditative; and there is nothing upon which my imagination has so constantly dwelt, as upon death. In my early years, surrounded by all that could rouse the passions, its image has often prevented my brooding over some cause of jealousy, some purpose of revenge, some hope deceived! In my festal hours, my ear has been caught by the story, of one of my acquaintance, suddenly called away, while his head was filled with folly, gallantry, and festivity. Accustoming myself to the reflection, that such might be my fate; whatever beneficial effect the thought might have, it left behind it no dejection. While these impressions are new,

they will be painful; but, by their constant repetition, we learn to bear them without shrinking."

There are philosophers, who have gone still farther: one of these used to employ his imagination, in picturing his own last illness and dissolution. "I conceive myself," he would say, "stretched on the bed of death; my medical attendants having finally withdrawn, and given place to the relatives and friends, who weep around. Visionary scenes then float before me; my reason wanders, and my words are incoherent; a chilly numbness creeps slowly over all my frame; cold, stiff, and motionless, I lie; with pale, emaciated countenance, and eyes sunk in their hollow sockets! That tongue, once so voluble, now refuses its office; short and deep pantings alone speak the difficulty of breathing; till, at last, a sigh,—a groan,—a struggle,—dismiss my soul from its mouldering prison! Thus life expires!—like a

vapour that is exhaled ! like spirits that evaporate ! like a time piece that has run its hour !

Every one then abandons me : all disperse, excepting, perhaps, some faithful, time-worn domestic, who pays me the last rites of humanity ; wraps my untenanted body in its winding sheet ; sees it enclosed in its sable and unpillowed bed ; watches its exit from the apartment, which it shall never more re-enter ; and follows it to the narrow cell, where its kindred dust conceals it from the world—for ever !”

The dead do not long demand their tomb in vain : the horrors that surround them constrain, even their dearest friends, to remove them quickly from their sight. Such scenes as these await us all ; and it is the highest wisdom to fix our eyes stedfastly upon them : perhaps, even now, the sentence is gone forth for us ; and shall we still preserve an anxious interest for the affairs of *time* alone ?

Ah! why so much toil, so much disquiet, concerning things so transitory! Were we to remain for ever in this world, the pains we take, to secure a splendid and durable establishment in it, might easily be reconciled to reason; but the hourly examples we see, of the fugitive nature of life, tend powerfully, it might be presumed, to create an indifference, as to temporal possessions, bordering on the extreme of indolence, and supineness. Let us ask ourselves, what opinion we shall form of these things, when we are upon the bed of death? The answer assuredly must be; that they will then appear of little moment; that our relish for pleasure will have palled; that riches cannot be carried to the tomb; and that all our honours must be laid low with us in the dust. And when misfortune, or injustice, have prematurely snatched away any portion of these; the reflection, that the grave would infallibly swallow up the whole, were all to

be left, will moderate our angry feelings; and present the loss, in a diminished point of view.

By manifesting an excessive fear of death, we deprive ourselves of that assistance from our friends, in our preparation for it, which would be of most important service. For, who will tell a dying man, that what he dreads is fast approaching? Who will press on him, the urgency of immediately performing every remaining duty, by the irresistible plea, that the night is almost come, in which he can no longer work? On the contrary, every thing, which might raise in him a suspicion of his impending change, is carefully kept out of sight. His wife, with ill-judging tenderness, opposes the honest zeal of the very few, who would give the important warning: whilst his children watch for the physician's arrival, to dictate the false encouragement they wish their father to receive. His friends rally him, on the

lowness of his spirits; and repeat the assurance that he is in no danger; though they perceive that he has not many hours to live. Even his servants wipe away, by stealth, the tears that cannot be restrained; and assume a gay and busy air, to favour the deceptive hopes that are held out. In short, at the very moment that he is expiring, no one dares to tell him, he is mortal! and the ministers of the Gospel are not summoned, to exhort him to sorrow for his sins, to genuine repentance, and a lively faith; until the poor misguided wretch has lost all feeling, all strength, all recollection!

It is better to suffer the mortal stroke, at once; than to die a thousand deaths, in fearing one.

Should the love of life have entwined itself with our nature, too closely to be shaken off, but by its dissolution; still we know that the messenger, who calls the exile home will free him from its thralldom. "Yes,"

may the christian confidently say, “ the last hour of my mortal life, is not the last of my existence. All that I see, and feel around me, are but the temporary accommodations of an inn; the travelling costume of a foreign land; pleasing and useful for a time; but not inducements to detain me from my father’s house !”

Nature reduces all who leave the world, to the same poverty, in which they entered it: nay, to still greater! for she strips them even of the bodies, with which, at their birth, she had invested them! Yet the day of this entire destitution will be, to the virtuous man, a natal day! the dawn of immortality!

Does religion indeed secure infinite, and eternal blessings, in a future state, to those, who take her as their guide in this? and are we yet, so senseless, so infatuated, as to cling to our crumbling tenements of clay!—illuminated, it is true, by transient gleams of

happiness; but drenched by the heavy showers of grief; sapped by disease and care; and shaken by the whirlwinds of ungoverned passion! Such is the frame we tremble finally to quit; linked as it is to a world, which we confess to be full of vanity and delusions; its pleasures, unsatisfactory; and its caresses, treacherous! But, let us yet more stedfastly contemplate that world, as it really is: the fragile texture of its gifts; the phantoms of felicity, with which it lures men on to guilt; the restless crowd of motley figures, as in a magic glass presented to our view, and vanishing as soon as seen; the ebb and flow of fortune's tide, raising one moment the little bark, which, in the next, it dashes to the ground. Let us descend into the recesses of corruption; and watch those secret machinations, darkly working the ruin of the unsuspecting, or by their premature explosion, filling all minds with horror and dismay.

Where the world promises liberty, it imposes slavery; where it offers the pledge of peace, it sows the seeds of discord; where it presents the cup of joy, it pours forth only the waters of bitterness. Its most ardent friendships blaze,—and are extinguished; its most specious titles are but inscriptions, which the hand of time will rapidly efface; its most enchanting pleasures, first inebriate the soul; then leave it to dejection and remorse. What are the magnificence, and glory of the world, but falling stars, which sink rapidly into the abysses of oblivion? Amongst all it offers to its votaries, is happiness to be found? The voice of past ages answers: “no.” The united experience of mankind proves, that nothing earthly is able to fill the capacity of an immortal soul! that worldly objects are too little in themselves!—too feeble in their powers! Their beauty, it is true, may catch the eye; their sweetness gratify the taste; but, not all can fully

satisfy the mind; they may engross and agitate the heart; but cannot bring it that perfect peace, which passes human understanding.

They are unsubstantial, illusive, transitory goods; or rather, they are, for the most part, real evils; seducing man to sin; but not saving him from sorrow. Riches themselves, weigh heavily on their possessor; and have many a cutting edge, and many a roughness, as galling as the debtors iron chain.

Virtue is, here below, continually exposed to shipwreck: Simplicity falls an unsuspecting prey to cunning; piety dares not appear; humility blushes at her own merit; and purity is ever liable to contamination: ridicule is the consequence of an abstinence from the gallantries of fashionable life; and a conscientious performance of our religious duties; and he is esteemed a visionary enthusiast, who rises above sensual pleasures,

to devote himself to the love of the Creator, and the study of his sacred word!

In one circle, we meet with pernicious maxims; in another, with seductive examples; here, we imbibe a poison, which corrupts the heart; there, encounter a sophistry, which warps the understanding. We hear christianity considered, merely, as a system of state policy, expedient to accomplish certain beneficial ends; but as derived from no divine origin; and thus deprived of its awful sanctions,—eternal rewards and punishments. We see hypocrisy throwing over vice, the resplendent veil of virtue. We behold the excess of rigour, in one place driving men into crimes; and, in another, see the basest flattery palliating guilt, and smoothing the descent to infamy!

Surveying with a steady and impartial eye, the chaos of the world before us, we discover an innumerable multitude of men, agitated by different passions, and alter-

nately the prey of pride, avarice, love, hatred, envy!—corrupted by sloth, enfeebled by voluptuousness, and beguiling others into the snares, which have proved fatal to themselves. A set of beings deceiving, and deceived; thwarting each other in the pursuits of interest and ambition; callous to the sufferings, and indifferent to the joys of their associates. We see corruption in manners, fantastic extravagance in dress, chicanery and fraud, in law and commerce; treachery and infidelity, in friendship, and in marriage. And last of all, and most to be deplored, as the deadly source of all the former evils, we perceive hypocrisy in devotion, and indifference, or supineness, in the great work of salvation; whilst, in all the concerns of this world, we find its children indefatigably active, and ardent in the extreme; loving, even to madness; hating, even to execration; and dejected, even to despair: distracted by jea-

lousy, transported by rage, and whelmed in sensuality! But for their soul!—for that immortal spirit destined to survive the shock of nature,—for that alas! they feel no interest, no anxieties; and seem scarcely to be conscious, that a divine principle exists within them!

Since the human mind is so formed, as to be strongly attracted by what is elevated, powerful, wise, beneficent, or glorious; let it not seek its chief gratification, from the faint shadows of these attributes, visible in the things of earth; but, let it turn to that being, in whom all perfections centre; to whom ascends the incense of a thousand altars; before whom bend the sceptres of unnumbered sovereigns! States, kingdoms, empires, are dispersed, like dust, at the breath of his displeasure! The thunders roll, the lightnings strike, the elements are convulsed at his command! All nature executes the will of her omnipotent Creator! He, in

himself, contemplates perfect wisdom! Who can speak its height, its depth, its fulness, or its unlimited extent! To his all-seeing eye, nature has no mystery,—time, no futurity!

Overpowered by the riches of his love, the heart, that would fain express its gratitude, can only “muse his praise.” His bounteous hand gives beauty to the fields, bloom to the flowers, enriches with golden veins the caverns of the earth; and strews with pearls, the profound abysses of the ocean! Oh! then, what created object shall dispute our heart with him, in whom all that is beautiful, all that is excellent, all that is great, all that is merciful is found! in whom we contemplate perfect truth, possess the sovereign good, enjoy supreme delight; without a shade to dim their brightness; no fear of death! no dread of alteration, or decay!

To the bosom of this God, through the mediation of our Redeemer, we humbly

hope to be admitted, when we have shaken off the load of life. This is the hope that triumphs over death! This,—this alone, completes the Christian's victory!

'The fewer our enjoyments in this sublunary state, the fewer obstacles have we to surmount, in our progress to eternal happiness: for, alas! the honied allurements of the world in which we are, too successfully entice us from the path that leads to life. To keep us in that path, we need clear and convincing views of the truths essential to salvation: now the world employs every means, to blind our understanding, and to mislead our will. We acknowledge, that sensual pleasures incapacitate the soul for heaven; and these the world incessantly presents, under the most seductive forms. Our Heavenly Father asks our heart; requires a preference so absolute, that neither earthly parents, nor the most cherished friends, shall stand in rivalry with Him. The

world, on the other side, claims to itself the exclusive possession of our thoughts, our talents, our affections: the observance of God's command, to love our neighbour, to bear his burdens, and forgive his offences, it regards as the proof of an abject spirit; and it urges us, to assert our rights to their full extent; and to take vengeance for the slightest injury. God enjoins so firm a faith, as to resist, even unto death, rather than forsake his laws: but the world, to the utmost of its power, enfeebles our religious sentiments, making them bend to every temporal interest. God has pronounced those to be blessed, who weep, and mourn, and suffer persecution: but the world, confidently bids us build our hopes of happiness, upon the prosperity which itself bestows.

Who then can live well, that has lived long in such a scene? Who can remain exposed to such temptations, and not fall?

Whilst it is the divine will, that we sojourn here below, let us direct our thoughts, and our desires, towards the heavenly habitations, prepared for those who love God and keep his laws; rather than fix them on the perishing abodes, which, for a season, we are doomed to occupy. The former “never fail:” the latter, we must soon forsake.

Oh! then, if, guided by a father’s hand, we quickly trace our steps towards the regions of the blest; should not the speed of our progression inspire us with fresh songs of praise, and heartfelt gratitude to him, who, knowing the elements of which we are framed, exposes us not to lengthened trial; but timely opens a way for our escape? Death, in this view, becomes an inestimable benefit. Its only sting is—*sin*; and of this, the grace of God is proffered to disarm it; if we will but avail ourselves of the divine assistance.

A happy death follows a life of piety and virtue: for, to obtain the promises of peace, we must bring forth the genuine fruits of faith. Banishing, then, the dread of death itself, let us fear only, lest we fail in preparation to die well. No other event, in the whole chain of our existence, can, in awful importance, equal this! *We can die but once!* And shall we suffer the issue of death to be uncertain; when error must be fatal, and its consequence irreparable? To die well, our vices must previously have died within us. What avail science, philosophy, and human prudence, if they conduce not to this end?

Think often then, I do beseech you, of your last hour; and regulate your whole life by a reference to it. Embrace the aid religion offers, to detach your soul from all that would detain it captive; and earnestly endeavour, during your short and uncertain time of probation here, to prepare your

spirit for a participation in those heavenly pleasures, which shall never end. A glorious death is indeed the crown of life: but a crown reserved for those alone, who have suffered no created object, to separate them from the love of God!

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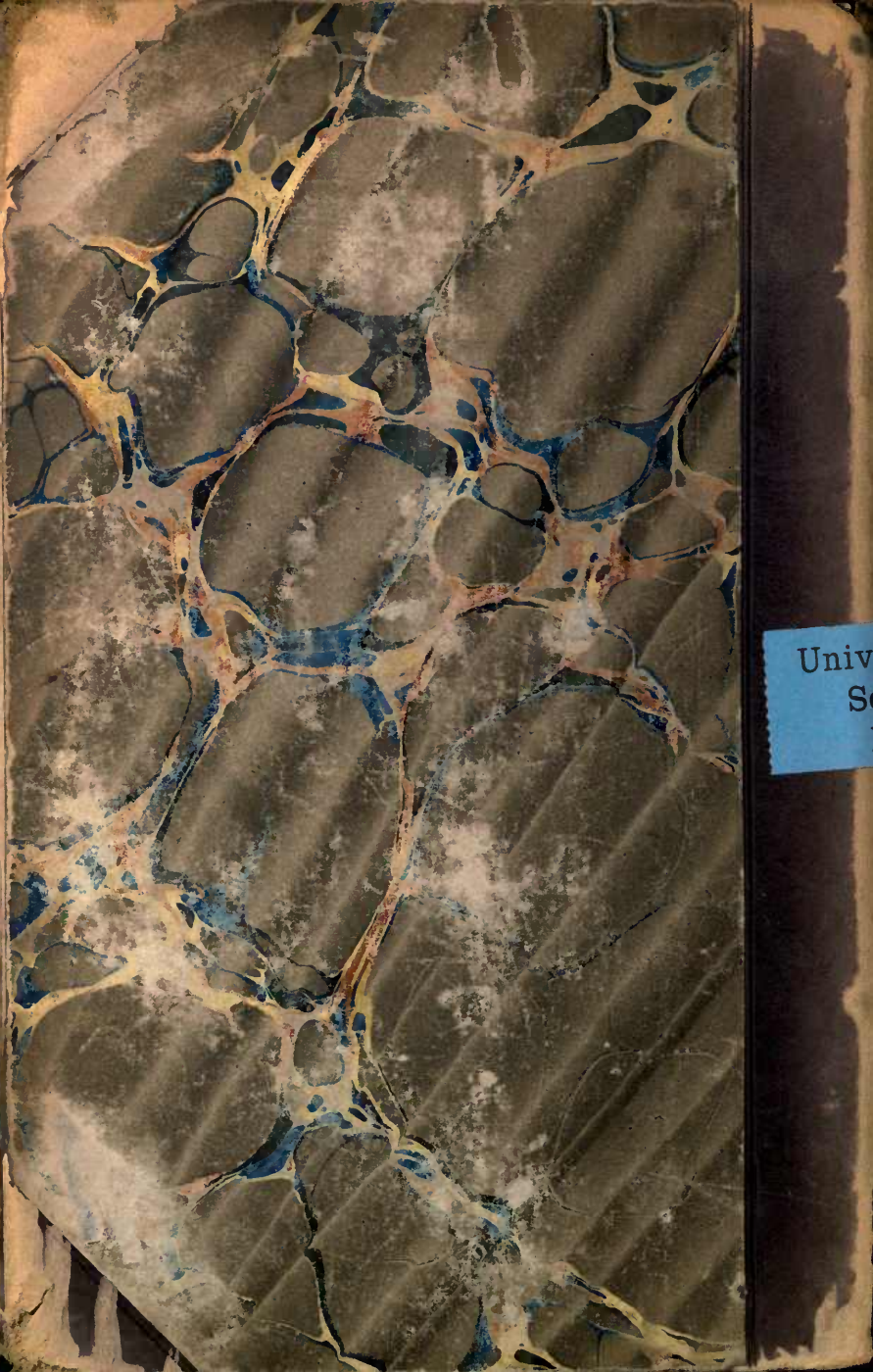


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